

# AFRICANUS JOURNAL

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## Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an academic, multilingual journal. Its goals are to promote:

- a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, based on the Boston campus (the Center for Urban Ministerial Education [CUME]).
- b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way).

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who are in a Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D. program or have a Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D., Ed.D., or equivalent degree.

Current publications authored by professors and students of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus (Center for Urban Ministerial Education) are featured interspersed throughout the journal.

## Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around A.D. 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around A.D. 231–233. In A.D. 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him “a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child” (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as “no ordinary historian” (*History*, I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a “monument of labor and accuracy” and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists’ genealogies (*History*, VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus’ writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Iulius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

## Other Front Matter

### Editorial team

Jennifer Creamer, Mark G. Harden, Alvin Padilla, Seong Hyun Park, Nicole Rim, John Runyon, Patrick Smith, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer

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### Summary of Content

This issue has numerous topics of concern to the church: how to respond to suicide, glaucoma, and diet. Several biblical and theological articles concern themselves with *shalom* and the thoughts of Martin Luther. Books on a variety of topics are reviewed.



# THE AFRICANUS GUILD



L to R: William David Spencer, Joo Yun Kim, Dae Sung Kim, Mark Harden, Quonekuia Day, Jennifer Creamer, Aida Besancon Spencer

*“The Africanus Guild provides an excellent opportunity to study with scholars who affirm the inerrancy of Scripture at the doctoral level. My mentors continually challenge me to greater thoroughness in research and clarity of expression in writing. The Africanus Guild has given me the support I need to become a better researcher, writer and teacher in a multicultural context.”*

–Jennifer Creamer

Jennifer is currently studying for a doctorate in New Testament at North-West University and is a member of the Africanus Guild program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She has completed master's degrees in Old Testament and in New Testament at GCTS. Jennifer has taught biblical studies at various University of the Nations campuses around the world.

# Developing a Christian Theology of Suicide

KAREN MASON

Clergy play a key role in suicide prevention (HHS, 2012) because suicidal people seek their help (Wang, Bergland, & Kessler, 2003) and because clergy minister to grieving communities following a suicide death (SPRC, 2004). My research colleagues and I have found that on average two suicidal people will seek clergy's help per year and on average clergy will be involved with three suicide deaths across their ministry experience (Mason, Geist, Kuo, Day & Wines, 2014). For example, one clergy told us that in his first week of being a pastor a woman called him and "she had a razor blade beside her and she didn't see any reason to live anymore" (Mason et al., 2011). In addition to getting training on how to intervene in these types of situations, one clergy person told us that it would have been "of great value" to reflect theologically on the issue of suicide *before* "the first time someone walked into my office and asked if their mom was in hell because of her suicide" (Mason, et al., 2014). Reflecting theologically on suicide is important because (1) Christians hold a spectrum of nuanced beliefs, (2) few denominations have a stated position on suicide, and (3) your theology affects what you do.

Suicide suggests theological questions like "If a Christian like Emily kills herself, will she go to hell?" While the answer may seem straightforward to you, Christians differ on their views, resulting in highly nuanced and complex theologies of suicide, which can be confusing. For example, in interviews with pastors, my research team has noticed that pastors struggle with the paradox of telling suicidal individuals that suicide is a sin—as a deterrent—and talking about God's mercy to loved ones who have lost someone to suicide—as a comfort to them (Mason et al., 2011). Clemons writes, "It is precisely this complexity [of suicide], and the resulting confusion, uncertainty, and discouragement, along with a lack of understanding of what the Bible says and does not say, that have kept most religious communities from addressing suicide with the urgency and careful attention it deserves in the midst of today's crisis" (Clemons, 1990, p. 97). My research colleagues and I have also found that not all denominations have positions on suicide though such positions could be helpful to clergy. Significantly more Protestant clergy compared to Catholic and Jewish clergy have reported to us that their denomination does not have a position on suicide (Mason et al., 2014). In addition, whether you have reflected or not on your theology of suicide, theological convictions will drive your approach to this ministry. Shneidman (1996) tells the story of a woman who attempted suicide, who was berated by a hospital nun for attempting suicide. The nun's theology drove her encounter with this woman.

Though important, theological convictions may not be a deterrent to suicidal people. Some suicidal people in crisis say fear of hell has kept them from killing themselves (Blauner, 2002). However, telling others that suicide condemns them to hell may not keep them from suicide because the hell they are experiencing inside may be worse than any feared eternal hell. A chemist's suicide note reads, "If there is any eternal torment worse than mine I'll have to be shown" (Ellis & Allen, 1961, p. 176). Robert Burton, a seventeenth century English parson, wrote "If there be a hell upon earth, it is to be found in a melancholy man's heart" (Burton, 1964, p. 433) Suffering, not theology, is the dominant focus (Shneidman, 1996).

In addition, some people who die by suicide anticipate going to heaven. A man who killed himself said, "It's hell here on earth; it'll be Heaven after I'm dead" (Robins, 1981, p. 229). Heaven may be yearned for as a place of reunion with those who have died. For those who are unsure, the future may be unknown enough to justify a gamble (von Goethe, 1971).

Though theology may not deter some from suicide, it's important to consider clergy's preference

to have reflected on their theology of suicide *before* they engage the issue of suicide in their faith community. The goal of this article is to offer you the opportunity to clarify your theology of suicide. Following is a listing of a spectrum of views and reasons used to support these views: four views that suicide is not a sin, four views that suicide is sin, four that suicide is a forgivable sin and one that suicide is an unforgivable sin. Included at the end is a listing of a few religious groups with links to their position on suicide.

## IEWS OF SUICIDE

### *I. Views That Suicide Is Not a Sin*

#### **A. Some Christians hold that suicide is not sin, citing diminished responsibility**

Some Christians believe that suicide is not sin, because a person who kills himself is a victim of insanity or demonic possession, unable to make rational decisions. For example, Luther (1967) said, “I don’t share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil” (p. 29). In other words, the person who attempts or dies by suicide has diminished responsibility and is therefore not guilty of sin. For these Christians, suicide within the context of depression would not be sin any more than getting the flu would be. Within this position, the theological question of eternal security is immaterial because suicide is not sin.

#### **B. Some Christians hold that suicide is not sin, citing the Bible’s silence**

The Bible mentions suicide seven times, but none of these narratives condemns suicide. What stands out in reading the accounts of Abimelech (Judg. 9:52-54), Samson (Judg. 16:30), Saul (1 Sam. 31:4), Saul’s armor-bearer (1 Sam. 31:5), Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18), and Judas (Matt. 27:5; Acts 1:18) is that the manner of death is not associated with dishonor. Samson is listed among the heroes of faith (Heb. 11:32). Both Samson and Ahithophel are buried in the family tomb (Judg. 16:31; 2 Sam. 17:23). Saul and his sons were honored by a proper burial by the Israelite men of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Chron. 10:11-12). David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan passes no condemnation on Saul’s manner of death (2 Sam. 1:19-27). In addition, not all Christians view the sixth commandment as prohibiting suicide. For example, Biebel and Foster (2005) argue that the sixth commandment was not a “general prohibition against killing anyone, since the Israelites, with God’s blessing, killed plenty of their enemies after they received the commandments. Nor does it seem to apply to suicide.” (p. 123). If a Christian adheres to this position, the question of eternal security again is immaterial because suicide is not a sin.

#### **C. Some Christians hold that suicide is not sin, citing the Early Church’s silence**

Fedden (1938) suggests that, historically, “the Church offers no opposition to suicide before the third century” (p. 31) because Apostolic Fathers (except Clement of Alexandria; see Droge & Tabor, 1992) merged the concepts of suicide and martyrdom, “St. Jerome and the Venerable Bede reverently place even Christ among the suicides” (Fedden, 1938, p. 10). Because of Christ’s example, zeal for death was notorious (Droge & Tabor, 1992). Tertullian wrote in 197, “Nothing matters to us in this age but to escape from it with all speed” (as cited in Droge & Tabor, 1992, p. 129). All types of voluntary death were believed to bring with them assurance of salvation (Droge & Tabor, 1992). Some of these voluntary deaths look like suicide. Droge and Tabor (1992) write, “One person’s martyr was another person’s suicide, and vice versa” (p. 188).

For example, early in the fourth century, Ambrose of Milan (n.d.) *praised* Pelagia who leaped from a building to avoid rape. Germanicus “drew the beast to himself and forced it to tear his body” and a woman from Edessa “dragged her son through the streets ... saying ‘I do it lest, when you have slain all the other Christians, I and my son should come too late to partake of that benefit’” (Donne, 1983, pp. 24-25). Fedden (1938) describes a “frantic proconsul faced by a mob of

Christians demanding martyrdom, [who] shouted, ‘Goe [*sic*] hang and drown your selves and ease the Magistrates’” (p. 120). The Early Church Fathers grouped all voluntary death together and did not condemn suicide.

#### **D. Some Christians hold some suicide is not sin, citing John Donne (1572-1631)**

A perhaps unexpected late Christian voice for suicide was John Donne, an Anglican priest and Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral. In seventeenth century England, suicide was a felony crime. “According to our English law, therefore, he who kills himself is reckoned as one who commits a felony against himself” (Donne, 1983, p. 37). The suicide corpse was buried at the crossroads at night with a stake through the heart (Alvarez, 1972; Chesterton, 1908; Jamison, 1999), a practice unique to England (Watt, 2001). In this context, Donne (1983) writes that there are some situations where suicide is justifiable, such as (1) “when I am weather-beaten and in danger of betraying the precious soul that God has embarked on me” (p. 46), (2) when God tells you to kill yourself, as Donne believed was true for Samson (p. 61), (3) when God can be glorified in no other way, as in an act that builds the faith of a weaker Christian (p. 81), and (4) because some biblical passages tell Christians to follow the Good Shepherd in giving up their lives, to have “a just contempt of this life” (p. 96). It is important to note that Donne himself was suicidal, he wrote a long treatise on the moral theology of suicide, but he himself did not choose suicide in the end (Alvarez, 1972).

## ***II. Views That Suicide Is a Sin***

#### **A. Some Christians hold that suicide is sin, stating that the Bible’s silence does not imply approval**

Winslow (1972) in the nineteenth century assumed that the Bible didn’t need to speak out against suicide because suicide is so obviously “atrocious” (p. 38). Bonhoeffer (2005) argued that the silence of the Bible on suicide is not a basis for condoning suicide. The Bible does not always comment on the sinfulness of acts. For example, though the Bible is silent on Samson’s visit to a prostitute (Judg. 16:1), he committed the sin of adultery. Hsu (2002) makes the point that the biblical narratives of suicide do not end well and therefore do not suggest approval or indifference to suicide.

#### **B. Some Christians hold that suicide is sin, citing the sixth commandment**

The sixth commandment states, “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20: 13, Deut. 5:17) and Genesis 9:6 reads, “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.” Winslow (1972) comments, “If I am commanded not to shed the blood of another man because he is made in the *image of God*, I am not justified in shedding my own blood, as I stand in the same relation to the Deity as my fellow-men” (p. 37). Augustine’s (1887) position in the fourth century was, “the law, rightly interpreted, prohibits suicide, where it says, ‘You shall not kill’” (bk. 1, ch. 20) and “no man ought to inflict on himself voluntary death...for those who die by their own hand have no better life after death” (ch. 26) and “it is therefore wicked to kill oneself” (ch. 27). Augustine argues, “A man may not kill himself, since in the commandment, ‘You shall not kill,’ there is no limitation added [as in ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor’]” (ch. 20).

In addition to using the sixth commandment, Augustine marshaled four other arguments against suicide: Christ never recommended it, Christians should live lives of faith and trust in God even in the midst of suffering, death cuts off the possibility of repentance, and suicide (a certain sin according to Augustine) should not be chosen instead of an uncertain sin, a sin which may not happen (like the rape of Pelagia, which is not certain to have occurred), and instead of a sin which is not one’s own (because the rapist, not Pelagia, would own the guilt). According to Augustine, the only time a person may take his or her own life is if God commands him or her to. He distinguished between suicide and martyrdom (Bels, 1975), viewing voluntary martyrdom as a possible Christian



response. Suicide was not to be considered an option for a Christian except in these very unusual circumstances, only if prompted by God and when one is very sure that “the divine command” (ch. 26) has been made as in the case of Samson.

The distinction between suicide and martyrdom is relevant today. Joiner (2005) writes, “many Muslim clerics concur that self-martyrdom and suicide are distinct” (p. 142). Martyrs die at another’s hand or in specific circumstances as a witness to their beliefs, and in suicide, death is instigated by one’s own hand. In the thirteenth century, Aquinas (1966) defined martyrdom as “the right endurance of sufferings unjustly inflicted... ‘Martyr’ in Greek means *a witness*” (p. 43). Bonhoeffer (2005) maintains the distinction: “As surely as one should offer one’s life as a sacrifice for others, so surely one should not turn one’s hand against oneself” (p. 200). Chesterton agrees, “A suicide is the opposite of a martyr” (p. 134).

Following Augustine, Church councils explicated the Church’s anti-suicide position over time.<sup>1</sup> The Council of Arles (A.D. 452) declared suicide “to be an act inspired by diabolical possession” (as cited in Stengel, 1964, p. 59) and condemned the suicide of servants (Fedden, 1938). The Council of Orleans (A.D. 533) denied funeral rites to suicides accused of crime, though it allowed funerals to ordinary criminals (Fedden, 1938). The Council of Braga (A.D. 563) condemned suicide more generally forbidding burial with “great ceremony” and burial inside the church for all suicides (López Bardón, 1907).

Aquinas (1975) argued against suicide:

Suicide is completely wrong for three reasons. First, everything naturally loves itself... Second, every part belongs to the whole in virtue of what it is. But every man is part of the community, so that he belongs to the community in virtue of what he is... Third, life is a gift made to man by God, and it is subject to him who is *master of death and life*. Therefore a person who takes his own life sins against God, just as he who kills another’s slave injures the slave’s master, or just as he who usurps judgement in a matter outside his authority also commits a sin. And God alone has authority to decide about life and death, as he declares in Deuteronomy, *I kill and I make alive* (p. 33).

#### **A. Some Christians hold that suicide is sin, citing the sanctity of life**

These Christians emphasize that life is sacred and inviolable based on Deuteronomy 32:39, Job 1:21, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 5:29, Philippians 1:20-26. Calvin believed that suicide was sin on three counts: only God can take life away, suicide goes against self-preservation, and one can resist diabolical possession. Calvin said, “Let us wait for the highest commander, who sent us into this world, to call us out of it” (as cited in Watt, 2001, p. 67-68).

Chesterton (1908) has a slightly different perspective. Suicide is sin because it denies life. He writes,

Not only is suicide a sin, it is the sin. It is the ultimate and absolute evil, the refusal to take an interest in existence; the refusal to take the oath of life. The man who kills a man, kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world...The suicide insults everything on earth...He defiles every flower by refusing to live for its sake (pp. 131-132).

Chesterton wrote during a period when suicide had become a poetic vocation. For example, Rigaud (1920) wrote, “*Le suicide doit être une vocation.*” (Suicide must be a vocation.)

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1 Clemons (1990) mentions early councils at Guadix (305), Carthage (348), and Braga (363) (p. 79). Fedden (1938) adds the Council of Auxerre (A.D. 578), the Antisidor Council (A.D. 590), the Council of Hereford (A.D. 673), the Council of Troyes (A.D. 878), the A.D. 967 decree of King Edgar and the Synod of Nîmes (1284) (pp. 134, 135, 144). Alvarez (1972) adds the Council of Toledo (A.D. 693) (p. 71). Durkheim (1951) mentions the Council of Arles (p. 327). Stengel (1964) adds the Council of Nîmes (1184) (p. 60). Watt (2001) also mentions the Synod of Nîmes (1284) (p. 86).

### **B. Some Christians hold that suicide is sin, citing the person's lack of faith**

Bonhoeffer (2005) writes, "Because there is a living God, therefore self-murder is reprehensible: the sin of unbelief...Unbelief does not reckon, in good things or bad, with the living God. That is its sin" (p. 198). During his early days in prison, Bonhoeffer (2010) wrote on a scrap of paper: "Suicide, not out of a sense of guilt but because I am practically dead already, the closing of the book, sum total" (p. 74). Despite his own despair, Bonhoeffer did not take his life.

### **III. Views That Suicide Is a Forgivable Sin**

Among Christians who believe that suicide is sin, many believe that the sin of suicide or self-murder is forgivable.

#### **A. The Current Roman Catholic View**

Historically, Roman Catholics held that suicide is an unforgivable mortal sin (Gallagher, 1993) that condemned a person to hell without forgiveness and absolution. It was viewed as unabsolvable because the sin occurs concurrently with death. In the current Roman Catholic view, since 1983 (Clemons, 1990), suicide is considered "gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993, paragraph 2281). On the other hand, the Roman Catholic church has included in its current catechism that "grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2282) and that "we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2283). The current Roman Catholic position raises the question of whether or not suicide is an unforgivable sin.

#### **B. Suicide is like any sin**

Some Christians believe suicide is forgivable because the sin of suicide is not any different from any other sin. In Revelation 22:15, murder is listed as one sin in a list of sins. Biblically, the only unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31) or the sin unto death (1 John 5:16). This view emphasizes that all Christians are miserable sinners, equally in need of God's grace and forgiveness. Even our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) and any one sin damns to hell. If any one of these sins (including murder) precludes a Christian from God's forgiveness, then all humanity would despair of God's forgiveness. For all Christians, the focus is on Christ's righteousness and grace (Rom. 3:22-24), and on his intercessional ministry (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-25) with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27). Nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:38-39). Lewis Smedes (2000), theologian and ethicist, writes, "Will Jesus welcome home a believer who died at her own hands? I believe he will, tenderly and lovingly. My biblical basis? It is the hope-giving promise of Romans 8:32, that neither life nor death can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus... I believe that Jesus died not only for the sins of us all but for all of our sins." The Carrs add, "The evidence, then, is that there is neither valid biblical nor 'natural' grounds for the church's condemnation of suicide as an unforgivable sin. It is an act that we do not want to condone or encourage, yet there is no evidence that it brings eternal damnation to its successful practitioners...God's grace is sufficient" (p. 103).

#### **C. Suicide doesn't preclude repentance**

Some Christians believe that suicide should be considered forgivable because it is presumptuous to assume a person did not repent. Donne (1983) writes, "To presume an inability to repent because you were not nearby to hear it is a usurpation" (p. 10). For example, the Carrs' daughter-in-law, who died by suicide, repented before the act as written in her suicide note: "All I can ask is Christ's

forgiveness and understanding....I feel sick, sick at heart and tired of living” (Carr & Carr, 2004, p. 45).

#### **D. All of us will die with unrepented-of sins**

Many argue against a concern with unrepentance based on our covenant relationship with God (Hsu, 2002). God’s covenant is one of steadfast love of his children whom he knows to be sinners, rather than a more transactional and mechanistic repentance of every misdeed. Bonhoeffer (2005) writes, “The widespread argument in the Christian church that self-murder makes repentance, and therefore forgiveness, impossible, is also insufficient. Through sudden death, many Christians have died with unrepented sins. This argument overvalues the final moment of life” (p. 199). Smedes (2000) adds, “But all of us commit sins that we are too spiritually cloddish to recognize for the sins they are. And we all die with sins not named and repented of.” While God clearly condemns sin, the paradox is that he is also merciful (Exod. 34:6-7); he deals with our sin not as we deserve (Ps. 103:10) and he can be trusted to be a fair judge (Isa. 61:8), because he is a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34).

#### **The Theological Issue of Eternal Security**

Within this position that suicide is a forgivable sin, a classical Calvinist would argue that a Christian who dies by suicide would remain secure in salvation. For example, Greene-McCreight (2006) writes,

Mental illness can potentially damage the soul, since it preys on the brain and the mind, but it cannot destroy the soul, for God holds the soul in his hands...The Christian’s relation with the triune God may not stop with suicide. Even though suicide is clearly an ultimate separation from fellow creatures, it is not more so than natural death. And natural death does not stop God from loving the soul, or the soul from loving God (p. 97).

#### ***IV. The View That Suicide Is an Unforgivable Sin***

Some Christians believe that damnation to hell follows the unconfessed sin of self-murder (Wilkerson, 1978). Suicide may be the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in that it may represent a complete loss of faith in God. For example, Wilkerson (1978) writes, “The Bible says our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. To destroy that temple is to blaspheme. It is an unpardonable sin” (p. 40). A possible Wesleyan Arminian approach would argue that a Christian in the act of suicide commits either a sin that remains unconfessed or the sin of apostasy, either of which might result in damnation (Harper, 2002). It is interesting that Wesley himself could “hardly believe the possibility that grace would ever be eclipsed by human choice” (Harper, 2002, p. 243). Because the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds are silent on the issue of eternal security, a range of beliefs based on biblical texts (e.g., Rom. 8:29-30; Heb. 6:4-6) proliferates.

#### ***V. Three Important Theological Perspectives to Consider***

A theology of suicide will include beliefs about sin and hell. The following three theological perspectives ought also to be considered as you develop your theology of suicide.

##### **Suicide’s impact**

Some sin has greater impact than other sin (Chesterton, 1908; Volf, 1996). Some Christians might argue that though the sin of suicide does not damn a person to hell anymore than lying or coveting, it certainly has a deep impact. These Christians are distinguishing two ways to think about sin, (1) vertically: how sin affects our relationship with God, and (2) horizontally, how sin affects our relationship with others and ourselves. While Christ’s atonement can cover suicide as equally as any other sin, suicide is an act that leaves a large wake of destruction behind it. It destroys a person and leaves many others to make sense of their own loss, shock, guilt, and anger.

Plantinga (1995) writes, “All sin is equally wrong, but not all sin is equally bad” (p. 21). He points out that a neighbor would rather us covet her house than steal it. He concludes, “the badness or seriousness of sin depends to some degree on the amount and kind of damage it inflicts” (p. 22). And this damage argues for the fact that suicide cannot be condoned. As Williams (1997) has noted, “What would Hume, as an empiricist, have made of the evidence which has now emerged about the aftermath of suicide? In many instances suicide appears to have such a devastating effect on the survivors that, if it were only the balance of suffering one were examining, one could conclude that the suicide was not ethically justifiable” (p. 104).

### **Choose life**

Regardless of whether you call suicide “sin” or something else, many<sup>2</sup> people feel that suicide is a violation of something deep in the human psyche, something that is morally objectionable. Durkheim (1951), a secular Jew, writes, “common morality reproves [suicide]” (p. 327). One clergy person I spoke with said, “We’re all here for a reason, and I don’t think that choosing your own end...counts as fulfilling your purpose.” Her point is that suicide is not an appropriate choice. Even secular mental health professionals who value tolerance of diversity will do what they can to prevent suicide—though Szasz (1986) dissents. For example, Joiner, Van Orden, Witte, and Rudd (2009) write, “We do not believe that people who die by suicide are making informed, rational decisions to do so. We also strongly believe in the value in preventing something that causes so much suffering for those directly affected by suicidal thoughts as well as their loved ones” (p. 168). Whether suicide is called a “sin” or “a violation of God’s will” or “wrong” or “doesn’t count,” the message is the same: “Don’t kill yourself.” Generally, people don’t approve of suicide and tell others not to do it.

### **Suicide as both moral and psychological**

Whatever your theology, suicide most often occurs within the brokenness of a mental health problem. While the focus of the article has been on various theologies of suicide, it’s important to affirm the paradox that a suicidal person may ask moral questions about suicide and experience disease at the same time. Plantinga (1995) argues, “Sin makes us guilty while disease makes us miserable. We thus need grace for our sin but mercy and healing for our disease” (p. 20). Suicidality involves both moral as well as emotional aspects. Lewis Smedes (2000) says it this way, “As Christians, we should worry less about whether Christians who have killed themselves go to heaven, and worry more about how we can help people like them find hope and joy in living. Our most urgent problem is not the morality of suicide but the spiritual and mental despair that drags people down to it.” For example, what is the most urgent problem when Jim<sup>3</sup> calls you at 10:30 p.m., sobbing, and tells you bit by bit that he plans to kill himself tonight because his wife has discovered his ongoing affair. He says he has disappointed God, his family and himself in an unforgivable way. His pastor helped to prevent suicide when she talked to Jim about God’s forgiveness (Rom. 5:20-21). In this case, the theology of forgiveness helped Jim, but, because suicide is both moral and psychological, theology may not always function as a deterrent. One clergy we interviewed said, “I don’t think [discussing theology is] gonna help the conversation....My issue right now is trying to keep them alive and if I thought [theology] would help, then I would interject it, but at that stage, I’m just trying to keep them from jumping” (Mason et al., 2011). It is important for each pastoral caregiver to reflect on how he or she weighs the paradox of morality and mental despair.

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2 Some do not. For example, Fedden (1938) believes that suicide is amoral, “There is something very niggard, very middle-class, very non-conformist, in judging a life by its exodus” (p. 13).

3 The name and some details of the situation have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual.



## Summary

For a suicidal person, the hell inside him or her might be feared more than an eternal hell. Pastors, chaplains and pastoral counselors need carefully to reflect on the panoply of theological and historical views on suicide, sin, forgiveness and eternal security, because these views affect what they do for the suicidal person. The similarity that runs through all views is “choose life.”

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## Appendix

### *Some Religious Positions on Suicide:*

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### *Resource:*

Anyone, including veterans and Spanish speakers, can call *anytime* (24/7) the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—1-800-273-TALK(8255)—to get help. When you call, you are routed to the crisis center in the Lifeline network closest to your location. A skilled, trained crisis worker will listen and can tell you about mental health services in your area. The call is confidential and free. Get more information about this resource at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

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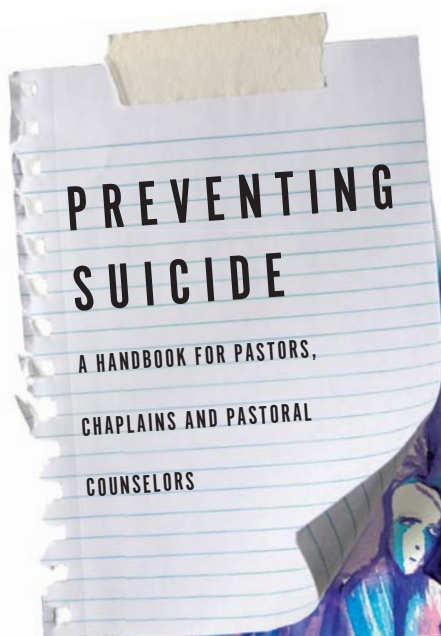
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# Discover the Church's Role in Suicide Prevention

KAREN MASON



233 pages, paperback, 978-0-8308-4117-2, \$18.00

Many pastors, chaplains and pastoral counselors play a vital role as agents of hope to people who are struggling, but most of them feel overwhelmed and unprepared to prevent suicides. In this practical handbook, Karen Mason integrates theology and psychology, showing how pastoral caregivers can teach the significance of life, monitor those at risk and intervene when they need help. Discover how you and your church can be proactive in caring for those at risk of self-harm.

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**DAVID B. BIEBEL**, coauthor of *Finding Your Way After the Suicide of Someone You Love*



**KAREN MASON** (PhD, University of Denver) is associate professor of counseling and psychology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a psychologist working in the mental health field since 1990. She previously managed the Office of Suicide Prevention for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and is a member of the American Psychological Association.



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# The Corridors of Strange Darkness: Struggling with Glaucoma

EUGENE L. NEVILLE

There are many life challenges and diseases that impact the lives of millions of people around the world. Life will always remain filled with a plethora of unending, enigmatic challenges. However relative to various diseases some are serious and dangerous. They are curable with proper immunization and medical treatments. There remain numerous others, still incurable and with devastating outcomes. I have chosen to use these pages to share with you information about an invasive disease, little of which has been discussed in the African American or other minority communities. Nevertheless, it is one that carries, embedded within itself, life altering physical, emotional and spiritual realities.

Today, I, as well as a large segment of people across this nation, contend daily with the silent ophthalmic disease called glaucoma. Glaucoma is a progressive eye disease that damages peripheral and central vision. If left undiagnosed and untreated, it can lead to total blindness. Glaucoma is no respecter of persons. Numerous people, by heredity, have become susceptible to this affliction.

There are different types of glaucoma. The most common diagnosis is called Primary Open-Angle Glaucoma. It is usually painless and has virtually no symptoms. Moreover, according to several medical research studies, glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness among millions of people, especially within the African-American and Hispanic ethnicities. Many of those with a predisposition of glaucoma did not realize they had it until it was too late. According to many leading ophthalmologists, this is why glaucoma is frequently called "*The silent thief of sight.*"<sup>1</sup>

In many cases, early detection and corrective treatments might have prevented blindness in countless individuals. It is therefore recommended, once diagnosed with glaucoma, to maintain annual checkups, and to encourage family members to do likewise. However, I do acknowledge that there are several mitigating factors which may cause some people not to seek medical advice or attention for this or some other life altering disease.

These etiological factors are just a few, namely (1) misinformation about the disease or treatment options, (2) distrust of the medical profession, (3) inadequate or no health insurance coverage, (4) major financial difficulties and, lastly, (5) pride and ignorance.

I also know firsthand what it feels like for a person born with natural vision, but now in later years, being confronted daily with the real possibility of becoming blind. That thought becomes a frightening and traumatic experience. Each day I discovered unique and provocative things about my mind. Interestingly, the human mind, when confronted by the unknowable has the capacity to conjure a plethora of strange thoughts and imaginations.

In some instances, depending upon one's ability to discern reality from fantasy, one's coping mechanism or support systems to handle disconcerting or painful information can easily succumb to the various types of negative, self-inflicting imaginations created by fear. These negative imaginations can progressively become a stronghold in our lives. Silently the mind hides and nurtures these strange imaginations which, sometimes years later, manifest themselves into injurious and attitudinal changes or behavioral disorders.

Personally, I experienced these things. Many years ago, I was examined by an optometrist and was diagnosed with borderline glaucoma. I minimized its importance because there were no physical symptoms or apparent threats to my present wellbeing. Moreover, I had no clue what the term actually meant. The optometrist did not take the time to explain clearly the condition or its

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1 See [www.alcon.com](http://www.alcon.com); [www.nei.gov](http://www.nei.gov); [www.glaucoma.org](http://www.glaucoma.org); <https://intechweb.wordpress.com>

possible long-term outcomes relative to my overall eye health.

Many years later, because of my own lack of “self-care” and responsibility, I developed a severe ophthalmic condition attributable to glaucoma. Consequently, now I am contending with the reality of becoming totally blind. However, I am not overwhelmed by trepidation, anger or despair.

In these next few pages, I invite you to accompany me on a journey through various corridors that unfolded before me. In each corridor there were numerous challenges and awe-inspiring experiences, which in the long run, helped me to understand better myself in relation to my ophthalmic condition. In other words, each corridor enabled me to overcome numerous misconceptions that almost destroyed my chances to receive the curative treatments I needed to normalize the aggressive advancement of glaucoma, as well as, apply the healing balm needed for my mind’s eye. I am grateful to the medical doctors and family members who rescued me before I prematurely became another statistic. With a voice of triumph, I can unapologetically testify,<sup>2</sup>

I once could see,  
now I am blind.  
Now, I can really see!  
Thank you Lord!

### The Corridor of Blindness

When I reached the age of forty, I went to a local community optometrist and received a general eye examination in order to obtain a new pair of reading glasses. After a few cursory tests, the doctor informed me that I had borderline glaucoma. I considered it to be just another phase in the natural process of aging. At that time, the only prescribed recommendation was a stronger pair of reading glasses.

As the years rapidly passed, I noticed that my vision was diminishing, but, rather than seek medical attention, I continued to conclude that this was no big deal. It is just another one of those physical occurrences, common to everyone over forty. I surmised the only needed action to take was to acquire stronger reading glasses. I had deemed other things to be of a higher priority. For that reason, I never purchased the glasses, nor did I take the time to have my eyes reexamined until many years later.

Throughout the many years of pastoral ministry, my conclusions remained the same. As far as I could tell, there were no apparent ophthalmological changes beyond my normal diminished vision. However, it was not until I rearranged my priorities, set aside my prognostications and consented to be examined by an ophthalmologist that I discovered that my self-diagnoses were incorrect. The ophthalmologist explained to me that the pressure levels of both eyes were extremely high, and if left untreated they could inevitably lead to permanent blindness.

I was diagnosed with an extremely severe condition called *Primary Angle Closure Glaucoma*. The ophthalmologist explained to me that this ocular disease was serious. In her attempt to be certain that I understood the serious nature of my condition, she restated the condition in terms that were easier for me to comprehend. In layman terms she said:

The eyes naturally produce fluids behind themselves that flow through very fine veins into a drainage channel. This channel allows the fluids to flow effortlessly out of the eyes. Glaucoma partially clogs these channels, hindering the normal drainage, thereby increasing the buildup of eye fluid and pressure resulting in irreparable damage to the optic nerve. Comparatively, it was like attaching a garden hose to a turned on fire hydrant. Inevitably the garden hose would be severely impaired, beyond repair, destroyed.

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<sup>2</sup> Allusion to John 9:25.

My condition required immediate medical intervention. I clearly understood her analogy and accepted her recommendation to begin treatment. She assured me, although glaucoma remained incurable, nonetheless, there were new technologies and eye ointments that were effective in arresting its advancement. This new ordeal was another faith-stretching experience in my corridors of strange darkness.

### The Corridor of Healing the Blindness

The thought of becoming permanently blind is traumatic and could easily thrust me into a state of depression and despair. This silent thief, called glaucoma, after it does its damage, engenders all kinds of feelings because it can also dramatically alter every day existence. Many of the normal everyday freedoms and activities I had taken for granted had either been curtailed or diminished. Within a four year period, I underwent a multiplicity of eye examinations, intrusive eye surgeries and numerous intravitreal injections. I had so many pictures taken of my eyeballs that I felt as though I had a large portfolio sufficient to submit to an eye beauty contest. There were times when I had to stare into a light that was brighter than the noon-day sun. There was another examination called the *Visual Field Test*. This test was not only painless but frustrating. It is used to detect the extent of damage impacting the central or peripheral vision. For about ten minutes, I had to stare into a computerized machine keeping my eye focused on a tiny dark spot located in the center of a white screen. For a moment, I felt as though I was ushered into the center of deep space. I was further instructed to press a hand-held clicker each time I saw a tiny flashing white pin light. There were times when I was able to see every tiny dot, times when I saw nothing. There were also times when I was going stare crazy and began clicking at everything I thought was moving. This test was essential for the doctors because it helped them measure, monitor and control the extent of damage occurring in my eyes. I was glad when that test was over. However, there would be numerous other tests.

In an attempt to lower the extremely high pressure in my eyes, a myriad of ointments were prescribed and applied. For years, my eyes were anointed, with prescribed medications. Only doctors and pharmacologists could pronounce the names of these medications. Happily, each of the bottled medication tops were color coded. Sometimes the drops were effective and other times they were not. The medication and dosage had to be increased. I graduated from having to take two medications three times per day to over six medications. There were times when I had to take multiple drops every hour of the day for many weeks. I had to devise an anointing book just to keep track of the proper times and anointing dosages. I am so glad I did. A time had come when the eye drops were no longer sufficient, and laser surgery became the most viable option.

These next sequential corridors were sometimes frustrating, stressful, irritating, bewildering, humorous, humbling and inspiring. For several years, I went through various intrusive eye surgeries. I had numerous intravitreal eyeball injections. I shudder to recall my first eyeball injection experience. Honestly, I thought that I had been wrongly escorted into the laboratory of Dr. Frankenstein.

Prior to the surgical experience, I was not apprehensive, because the anesthesiologist was reassuring about the surgery. Although I would be awake throughout the operation, I nonetheless, would experience no pain. That was good news to me. However, he, nor the attending associates, prepared me for what was to follow. I did not find out until after I was laid down on the operating table.

My entire face was covered with a special surgical mask, exposing only my eye. Lights that appeared to be as bright as the morning sun were pulled down above my head. Then out of the corner of my eye, I saw the surgeon approach me with an injection needle. I thought he was going to use it to inject Novocain into my jaw to numb further my eye. Instead, I was shocked almost

out of my socks. He inserted and twisted the needle straight into my eyeball! I was terrified. I remembered clutching the table in total disbelief.

To my further astonishment, I saw him approach me again with another needle. Before he stuck me again, I yelled out, “Not again?” He responded, “Do you feel any pain?” With trembling in my voice, I said, “No, but I really do not want to see or feel anything!” He instructed the anesthesiologist to apply additional medicine, and then proceeded to inject my eyeball two more times. I was traumatized by that experience and vowed to myself it would never happen like that again. However, since that day, I had to experience many more injections, but rest assured, in every situation, before the doctor was permitted to proceed, they were expected to first answer my questions. Since that notable day, I have undergone about twenty seven intravitreal eyeball injections.

Moreover, I had laser surgeries (*light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation*), cataracts removed from both eyes, and a trabeculectomy inserted in my left eye (*a piece of tissue in the drainage section of the eye is removed, creating a new opening which allows fluid to drain out of the eye, bypassing the clogged drainage channels of the tiny mesh channels thus releasing the fluid to drain into the blood stream*).

Due to the severity of the glaucoma in my right eye, and the ineffectiveness of numerous medications to lower the eye pressure, it was deemed necessary to have what is called a Baerveldt implant. This procedure involved placing a flexible silicone drainage pouch in the eye. This device was designed to enhance drainage through the eye’s natural system. It was used to sustain the subsequent reduction of the eye pressure. The operation was very successful, and dramatically reduced the eye pressure.

While I was in Boston, Massachusetts, the Retina Specialist discovered another reason why, despite the aggressive treatments, my vision was not improving, instead it was diminishing. This was now attributable to the development of what is called a “macular hole.”

The Retina Specialist explained to me that a “macular hole develops when the nerve cells of the macular become separated from each other, and pull away from the back surface of the eye.” Correcting this condition required additional eye surgery. The nature of this surgery also required strict adherence to post-operative healing measures. Non-adherence could result in serious outcomes. It sounded to me as though I had to prepare myself for another major battle getting ready to take place within my eyes and mind. When the doctor further explained the nature of the surgery and the meticulous recovery process, I adamantly refused to accept that option. From my perspective, I would have to place myself in an untenable and incapacitating position for a prolonged period of time. I could not believe what I was hearing.

It was at this juncture that I invited my wife to come into the doctor’s office to verify if I heard him correctly. The doctor restated the entire procedure. My wife confirmed the doctor’s explanation, we looked at each other and she agreed with my decision. She said, “That sounds ridiculous. It is unlikely that his active schedule and lifestyle could accommodate those requirements.” If the truth be told, I had no intention of trying to adjust my schedule to work synchronistically with the prospects of that type of surgery. No matter what the doctor said or anyone else thought to me that constituted cruel and unusual punishment.

The surgical aspect was not the problem. What was problematical was the post-operative requirements and potential side effects. When I heard the doctor restate the information to my wife, it was as though every past voice, every past image and imagination from the past, jumped as a gang style into my mind. I sensed that this was going to be another defining moment which I had to fight.

Even though the doctor spoke softly and apologetically, foolishly, I immediately jumped to



my feet and said, “You must think I’m crazy?” There is no way that I could think of submitting to that kind of procedure. Sarcastically I said, “No way, no shape, no how!” Truthfully, in my mind the darkness of pride had risen. It caused me prematurely to conclude that my ability to fulfill many other pressing responsibilities would be delimited or become nullified. I also thought that it would radically alter my present state of wellbeing. Therefore, I felt justified by my decision not to undergo this type of surgery.

Maybe you might agree with or at least understand the reason for my decisive decision. This is what the post-operative healing procedure entailed. Surgically, a gas bubble would be inserted inside the eye. The purpose of the insertion was to maintain a proper amount of pressure to float against the macular gradually sealing the hole. After several months, the gas bubble would slowly dissipate and the macular hole would be resealed. However, in order for the post-surgery to be successful, it would be imperative I would strictly adhere to the post-operative healing measures. These measures required that I lay prostrate, remaining still as possible, with my head in a face down position for approximately twenty hours each day for a period of several weeks. In some cases it might take weeks or a few months for the gas bubble to dissipate completely. Vision misalignment and color distortions could also become other temporary post-operative side effects. Having previewed the various support equipment provided little consolation. I was not certain whether it was fear or pride that helped me to decide that this procedure was a nonviable option.

Two years later, while in Florida, I noticed a significant change in my central vision, so I sought the opinions from other retina specialists. After multiple examinations, it appeared as though the retina membranes had experienced something that looked similar to a serious volcanic eruption. The normal membranes should look like a smooth plain, but mine looked instead like hills, valleys and mountains. The doctors informed me that blindness was imminent unless I underwent an eye operation known as Vitreo Retinal Surgery.

For me, it was that same dreaded “gas bubble” operation. I began to sense that uncanny intrusion of fear and pride. However, in 2012, I successfully underwent both the Vitreo-Retinal surgery and Epiretinal Membrane surgery. Although the glaucoma was aggressively monitored and treated, the prognosis still remained poor.

The question one might ask is, “How did you make it through that trying Vitreo-Retinal ordeal?” It was not easy. Truthfully, it was only by the grace of God and a supportive wife. The Lord had radically to adjust my thinking and attitude. Pride, anger and fear were removed, in its place my thoughts were brought under control and shifted to a place of remembrance.

Each hour as I lay prostrate across a small bench in my living room, I began to remember the painful experiences, but joyful testimonies of my sisters, brothers and close friends who persevered through their struggles although they laid dying from an incurable cancer. They kept their faith, because it was deeply rooted in the reality of God’s will and presence. They held onto, what was written in the Scriptures, God is “an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1). Therefore, they never yielded to their fears, nor surrendered their hope.

I was deeply humbled, and at the same time, immeasurably inspired by those precious remembrances. I realized how foolish and prideful I had been. In comparison to their health challenges, my tests were only gentle setbacks. Those remembrances helped me to face my fear, swallow my pride and endure my cross. Throughout those strange hours, days and weeks, as I continued to remain immobile and confined to the living room or bedroom, the negative thoughts that desperately tried to arise were repressed by unending gospel songs and hymns that arose in my spirit. I also sensed the inspiring prayers of my family and friends encouraging me to “hold onto God’s unchanging hand.” Momentarily, the strange darkness might have knocked me down, but it did not knock me out.

After going through the surgeries, daily eye anointing, and months of follow-up examinations,

the advancement of glaucoma has been minimalized, and the retina in both eyes is healing. Overall the surgeries were very successful. Although my vision remains diminutive, and I see everything differently, I, nevertheless, can still see. Walking through this corridor, with severely diminished vision was not always laced with peaceful moments. There were times when I became frustrated and upset with the condition. When I am at home, the incandescent lighting raises a set of new daily challenges, relative to the rapid disappearance of objects.

The furniture in my home predominately is black. Strategically, I placed several large yellow flashlights in different sections of the house, not because I was fearful of falling. It was due to the fact that every time I placed an object down, I found myself playing for about fifteen minutes the childhood game of hide and go seek. The flash lights curtailed the long search.

Considering everything I had already been through, these ventures were entirely something new. I would no longer just be contending with the precarious strange darkness, now I would be learning how to cope with the various effects light would have upon my vision. These new experiences became another step in the process of my spiritual, emotional and physical healing.

### **The Corridor of Spiritual Healing**

All of us at some point in our lives will yearn for physical or spiritual healing. The prophet Isaiah announced that one of the salvific manifestation of the Messiah of God would be to usher in eternal peace and spiritual healing for the people of God. Speaking of Christ, he said,

He was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:5)<sup>3</sup>

I am pleased to say that I am still in the process of healing. The rapid advancement of glaucoma has been slowed down. I still have a few residual ophthalmic challenges. I continue to anoint my eyes daily in order effectively to maintain normal eye pressures. Although the privilege to drive my car has been curtailed, yet, it has not stopped me from participating in a wide variety of creative activities or other meaningful ventures. I wish I could say that the illusive shadows of darkness have totally dissipated, but that would be misleading and untrue. The adversary of fear leaves us alone, only for a brief season, then it comes back with intense vengeance. However, my mind, heart and soul have been made whole by the “healing wounds” of Jesus Christ.

Although the struggles and vicissitudes in this life may continue, they, nonetheless, have been stripped of their capacity to paralyze me with fear. The purpose of my life has become clearer. At this particular season in my life, I am no longer trying to identify illusive shadows or run away from painful realities of life. Instead, there still remains, deep inside of me, a yearning which beckons me to live out the remaining years of my life, not in vain, but in a manner pleasing to God. Also, I still have a burning passion in my soul to be of help to somebody. There is a beautiful unending song which continues to serenade my soul:

If I can help somebody, as I pass along,  
If I can cheer somebody, with a word or song,  
If I can show somebody, how they’re traveling wrong,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.

If I can do my duty, as a good man ought,  
If I can bring back beauty, to a world up wrought,

---

<sup>3</sup> All Bible quotations are from TNIV unless otherwise noted.

If I can spread love's message, as the Master taught,  
my living shall not be in vain.<sup>4</sup>

### The Corridor of Hope and Victory

In conclusion, prayer, when uttered in humility and with authentic faith in Almighty God, has incomprehensible and immeasurable power. This eternal truism was unveiled to the world long ago by the Lord Jesus Christ. He stated that, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matt 18:19). The great apostolic benediction of Saint Paul also exemplifies this fact:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,  
according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in  
Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph 3:20-21).

Each person has been endowed with the capacity to make choices. However, some choices we make are wise, while others are not so wise. Nonetheless, the choices we make often determine the longevity or quality of our lives. Apart from an unexpected accident or a nefarious act of violence enacted upon us, we can choose to walk with and by faith, or become emotionally paralyzed by fear or anger. We can choose to die in a state of helplessness or to live victorious with hopeful expectations. The Holy Scripture clearly states in Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." God's desire for all of humanity is that we are willing to choose life:

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and  
curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you  
would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! (Deut 30:19 NLT)

In harmony with this Scripture, William Arthur Dunkerley, a prolific twentieth century poet, penned these thought-provoking words in the poem "The Ways,"

To every man there openeth a Way, and Ways and a Way.  
And the High Soul climbs the High way, and the Low Soul gropes the Low, and in  
between, on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro.  
But to every man there openeth a High Way, and a Low.  
And every man decideth the Way his soul shall go.<sup>5</sup>

The choice remains ours. While we still have the breath of life silently pulsating through our lungs and while we still have activity in our brain and can think with a clear mind, wisdom beckons us to choose life. The greater life can only be found in Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Thank you for patiently walking with me all of the way through my many sequential corridors. It is my earnest prayer, that as you continue your own journey, contending with your own corridors of life, your own strange darkness, that you will never become discouraged to the point of losing hope. Always remember, God loves you. The Lord Jesus Christ will always be a present help in the midst of your darkest moments, and the Holy Spirit will enable you to persevere through any and all human reversals and infirmities. God will be glorified and your strange darkness will only become as a fleeting shadow. Do not be afraid to walk by faith and not by sight. Soon, one day, we all will be able to share our testimony to the world: ***We once were blind, but now, we see! Hallelujah!***

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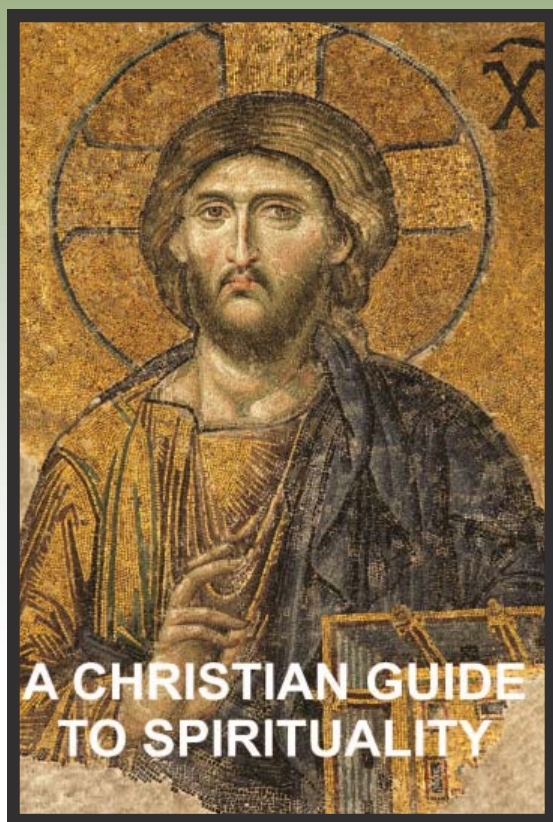
<sup>4</sup> "If I Can Help Somebody" was written by Alma Bazel Androzzo in 1945.

<sup>5</sup> John Oxenham, *Bees in Amber: A Little Book of Thoughtful Verse* (New York: American Tract Society, 1913), 19. John Oxenham is the pen name for William Dunkerley. See also [www.fullbooks.com/Bees-in-Amber1.html](http://www.fullbooks.com/Bees-in-Amber1.html) accessed 7 March 2015.

Rev. Eugene L. Neville is the retired Pastor and Founder of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Inc. in Brockton, Massachusetts. He served with distinction in the Christian ministry for over forty five years. He has developed and implemented numerous ministries utilizing technology not only for his congregation, but also assisting other churches across the country. He has taught and mentored over twenty men and women in preparation for ministry. He served as the first Project Director of the Black Church Capacity Building Program for a leading philanthropic foundation in Boston, Massachusetts. Rev. Neville is also one of the founding members of the Center for Urban Ministerial Education in Boston.

For several years Rev. Neville served on various boards within the greater Brockton community. He left the city of Brockton with a rich legacy by establishing the Amara Computer Learning Center, the Emergency Food Programs for the homeless and a Home Goods Distribution Ministry for the needy. He also developed the Prison Family Reunification Ministry in order to help reintegrate former inmates into their homes, work force and community. Lastly, he and his wife developed the Higher Education Research Center, which is a program designed to assist socially and economically marginalized youths prepare for and gain entrance into college.

Rev. Neville is a man with a vision and a commitment to encourage and empower people to live above their human constrictions. In 1973, he graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he earned the Masters of Divinity degree. He and his wife Ruth are the proud parents of two daughters, Evette and Evonne, and five grandchildren. He and his wife presently reside in the city of Clermont, Florida.



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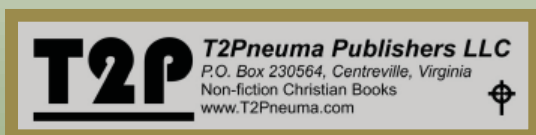
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# Diet and Cross-Religious Witness

CRISTINA RICHIE

## Introduction

Each major world religion (Judaism; Islam; Hinduism; Buddhism)<sup>1</sup> as well as a variety of minor religions (Sikhs; Jains; Rastafarians; some Bahá'í; and some neo-pagans) have restrictions on the consumption of meat in the diets of adherents—that is, every major world religion except for Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Christian liberty is a hallmark of the faith, and thus there are no dietary restrictions. However, the goal of Christianity is not the liberty of the self, but the salvation of others through the spread of the Gospel. The great apostle Paul captured this sentiment when he wrote, “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor 10:24).<sup>3</sup>

Christianity is self-sacrificing for the sake of Christ rather than self-centered for one's own freedom. In order to display empathy for others in different faiths, and as a major step in evangelism, I will explore the idea that Christians dwelling among people where other religions restrict their own consumption of meat relinquish their “right” to eat meat and adopt a modified or fully vegetarian diet. This applies to the Christian living in India as much as it does to the American in a multi-religious city. Christians who modify their diets have barriers to evangelism broken down and show compassion for those in other traditions.

This article will first overview the rationale behind modified vegetarianism in other religions by looking at the holy literature from each tradition.<sup>4</sup> This will deepen the Christian understanding of the significance behind abstaining from eating meat in the major world religions. Then the article will survey the biblical teachings on meat eating in Christianity. Brief narratives from Christian missionaries will be presented, and the article will conclude by advocating that both missionaries and laity ought to reconsider their eating habits so that “people from all nations” may come to Christ without undue obstacles.

## Meat-free in Other Religions

Most Christians have observed that other religions do not eat all the foods Christians do. Whether they are operating a kosher deli in New York or serving their families in Pakistan, non-Christians have certain dietary restrictions built into their religions for very serious moral and spiritual reasons, of which Christians are often unaware. In broad terms, Jews and Muslims abstain from certain meats for “cleanliness” reasons, while Buddhist and Hindus abstain from meat for “theological” reasons. This bifurcation, albeit simplified, will be helpful for the purpose of this article by identifying the similarities between the monotheistic, “Western” religions—Judaism and Islam—and non-monotheistic, “Eastern” religions—Hinduism and Buddhism, while also deepening appreciation for the more recent religions, Islam and Buddhism, which grew out of the more ancient traditions, Judaism and Hinduism, respectively. I will begin with Judaism, the foundation of Christianity and Islam.

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1 By denoting “major” and “minor” religions I am referring to number of adherents.

2 Some Christian denominations, such as Seventh-Day Adventists, are vegetarian, but most Christians worldwide generally agree that meat eating itself is not against Scripture. More and more, Christians are becoming vegetarian for ethical reasons such as the cruel situation of factory farming, the immense carbon emissions from cattle that are bred for food, and the rapid depletion of fish killed for human consumption. These concerns can be loosely traced back to Scripture. See Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker, eds., *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* (Peaceable Kingdom Series) (Eugene: Cascade, 2012).

3 *Today's New International Version* will be used throughout.

4 I refer to the corpus of writings in other traditions as “holy literature” to respect their own view of their writings. For the Christian, and especially for the Evangelical, the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the inspired word of God. Yet I do want to take seriously the literature of other traditions in creating their own moral and religious teachings.

## I. Judaism and Kosher Foods

Our brothers and sisters from the Jewish faith, with whom Christians share more than half of the Bible, have many reasons from the *Torah* to reject consumption of certain meats. Harkening back to the beginning of creation, the first humans were total vegetarian, as indicated by Genesis 1:29-30:

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move on the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

Humans from creation until the time of the flood were also vegetarian, but after the flood Yahweh permitted humans to eat meat. Genesis 9:3 says, "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." No sooner did Yahweh permit the killing of animals for food, than God set up regulations concerning their slaughter, commanding, "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it" (Gen 9:4, cf. Lev 17:10). The simple rule of kosher killing was elaborated in later portions of the *Torah*, but the bulk of regulations concerning diet are included in the cleanliness code of Leviticus.

The book of Leviticus enumerates the ways in which the Israelites were to be holy and set apart for God. Dietary regulations were one way of separating their actions and habits from their pagan neighbors. Leviticus 11 sets the precedent for determining which animals are "clean" to eat and which ones are "unclean." This chapter in the Pentateuch effectively covers land animals (11:3-8, 26-31, 41-45), water creatures (11:9-12), flying birds (11:13-19), and flying insects (11:20-23). The book of Leviticus also gives guidelines for the killing of animals considered clean, such as Leviticus 17:10, "I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from their people." Clearly the early Jewish people learned that not all food was to be eaten.

The *mitzvah*, or commands, of God to keep dietary purity by not eating certain animals is recorded elsewhere in the Bible when Daniel clung to his religious belief as a captive in Babylon (Dan 1:8, 12) and refused to eat unclean meat. The loyalty of Daniel to abstain from eating non-kosher foods is still seen in the Jewish people who take the commands of God literally and do not eat certain meats. For the devout Jew, people who eat unclean meat are unclean themselves and acting as pagans do. As an act of closeness and obedience to God, avoiding foods such as pork and shellfish is mandatory. The continuity in dietary restrictions for the Jewish people confirms that they are acting within the will of God. The person who eats non-kosher food is surely not a chosen person of God.

## II. Islam and Halal Foods

In a similar vein, a Muslim will not eat certain meats because they are also considered unclean. To the devout Muslim, the *Qu'ran* (or *Koran*) is the word of *Allah* (God) recorded through the prophet Muhammad. It contains rules for living and is as much of a holy book as the Bible is for Christians.<sup>5</sup> The *Qu'ran* details what is *halal* (lawful) and what is *haram* (prohibited). Avoiding the meat of pigs is central for Muslims, just as it is for Jews.

In the sixth chapter of the *Qu'ran*, entitled "The Cattle," forbidden food is that which is "already dead, or (has) blood, or (is) the meat of pig, for it is foul."<sup>6</sup> This command is also repeated in "The Cow" (2:173), "The Table" (5:3) and "The Bee" (16:115). This is similar to Jewish kosher

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5 Although with the rise of the Germanic biblical criticism of the late 1800's and the current distaste of those in industrialized countries for the authority of the Bible, one could argue that the *Qur'an* is held in higher regard by many Muslims than the Bible is by many Christians.

6 M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *Qur'an* (Oxford World's Classics) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6:145.

laws, which is not surprising considering they are both Abrahamic faiths. That is, Islam traces its religious roots back to one true unitarian God, who has sent prophets to the people reminding them of their commitment to God. In addition to prohibitions on meat eating in Islam that stem from “cleanliness” motivations, there are also theological reasons for abstaining from some meat.

In a tone more similar to early Christian concerns, the second chapter of the *Qu’ran* tells Muslims that they are not to eat “animals sacrificed to other than God.”<sup>7</sup> Idolatry was rampant in early Islamic society, so the return to monotheism and the separation from polytheism, which sacrificed animals to “gods” other than *Allah*, was necessary. The command to be set apart from the pagans, once again, informed regulations regarding meat eating. Meat sacrificed to idols was considered idolatry for a people who were seeking to submit (the meaning of the Arabic word “*islam*”) to *Allah*, therefore devout Muslims avoided certain animal flesh.

The restriction of certain meats is just one aspect of this multi-faceted religion that regulates clothing and rituals of its adherents. Islam as a religion is preoccupied with purity, and commands given in the *Qu’ran* against eating certain types of meats are rigorously maintained. People who eat *haram* meat are repulsive to the Muslim, as they are eating the flesh of filthy animals. This is a clear violation of the will of *Allah*, and Muslims have diligently set up *halal* markets to separate themselves from idolaters who eat pork. There can be no fellowship at a table that dines with swine.

For both the Jew and the Muslim, who trace their faith back to a belief in one God, meat with blood still in it is also unacceptable for consumption. The cultural and religious entrenchment of such regulations is a staple of their traditions and a part of their identities. Each person’s worldview informs the way they see others. For both Jew and Muslim, those who are not kosher or *halal* are unclean. Growing up in a religion where certain meats are unclean influences how one views forbidden meat eating and those who consume it. Christians, if they consume pork products, are rejected as unclean and, moreover, clearly outside of the will of God to Jews and Muslims.

### III. Hinduism and *Abinsa*

On the other side of dietary regulation are Hindus and Buddhists who refrain from eating meat for philosophical or theological reasons. In general, they prohibit meat not because it is ritually “unclean,” but because it is theologically unacceptable to kill a sentient being for various reasons. Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in *samsara*- the transmigration of the soul. Each creature, including each human, is reborn after it dies. Therefore, an animal may well have been a human at another time. Furthermore, Buddhists and Hindus recognize that animals that are killed for food feel pain and thus inflicting harm on them by killing them causes negative *karma* (the moral merit of one’s deeds) to accrue, thus making it more difficult to escape the cycle of life-death-rebirth.<sup>8</sup>

Since Buddhism grew out of Hinduism, it makes sense that some of the historical traditions would be similar. Both of these religions demand high compassion for all creatures, considering that all beings are connected in this world and the next. Therefore, the Hindu and the Buddhist are warned against taking the life of an animal, lest they hinder their goal of a desirable afterlife.

Hinduism is essentially a works religion. One must act in accordance with certain principles, make offerings (*puja*) to gods, and perform other ceremonial acts to enhance one’s position on the wheel of *samsara*. One of the doctrines that can and should be observed as a Hindu is *abinsa*, or non-violence. Non-violence in the Hindu scriptures are twofold: the first speaks against the killing of any living thing; the second speaks against the slaughter of animals specifically. I will focus on the latter for the purposes of this article.

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<sup>7</sup> Haleem, *Qu’ran*, 2:173.

<sup>8</sup> In Hinduism the cow has additional reverence given to her, therefore prohibitions against eating cows are the strongest. Ascetic Hindus- monks and priests- are strict vegetarians even though many “lay” Hindus will eat other animals like chicken.

One of the books that the Hindus consider authoritative, the *Tirukural*, says, “What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any creature.”<sup>9</sup> One can circumvent slaying beasts through adopting a vegetarian diet that does not include eating any animal flesh. The path of goodness and concern for an ethical life comes when all life—human and animal—is maintained. Killing is violent, but maintaining sentient life is non-violent.

Another Hindu passage states, “Virtuous conduct is never destroying life, for killing leads to every other sin.”<sup>10</sup> If one is willing to destroy the life of another being, which can feel pain, and is a creature on the earth along with humans, what would stop that person from committing other, possibly greater, harms? Life, even the life of an animal, is to be preserved and not destroyed. Hindus avoid meat for these reasons and look down upon those who kill other creatures—Hindu or not.

The benevolence of Hindu philosophy may also be expressed with another saying from the same book: “Goodness is never one with the minds of these two: one who wields a weapon and one who feasts on a creature’s flesh.”<sup>11</sup> Of course, one would have to use a weapon to kill an animal, but this counsel goes beyond just the act of killing an animal by also discouraging the act of harm against a human. The Hindu devotion to pacifism is impressive, and the notion of vegetarianism is promoted both through lauding the virtues of a peaceful life, “the good way,” and also through shunning those who follow a cruel path. People who kill animals are acting with *hinsa*, or violence, and hinder their path to the ultimate spiritual liberation.

While fully acknowledging the desire to eat meat is a part of human inclination, the *Mahabharat* nevertheless states, “He who desires to augment his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures lives in misery in whatever species he may take.”<sup>12</sup> The symbiotic nature of creatures and humans, the cycle of life, and the belief in reincarnation form a strong web of beliefs for the Hindu. The highest ideals of liberation include compassion for other creatures since one cannot anticipate with certainty if they might enter the body of an animal upon reincarnation. Therefore, they do well to avoid any animal flesh.

As Hindus believe they are on the path to liberation and are bound by the laws of *karma*, they attempt to avoid meat, violence, and killing. These three are always linked. As a corollary to the Hindu view of animal consumption, we might also take a brief look at Sikhism, noting the similarities.

The Sikh religion, which originated in India, is a mixture of Islam and Hinduism beliefs and rituals. Adherents are monotheistic (as in Islam) but believe in reincarnation (as in Hinduism). All Sikhs maintain totally meat-free diets, tracing back to the Hindu caste system and the division of contaminated labor, in other words, those who handled corpses. In Sikhism, as Eleanor Nesbitt notes, “the abhorrence of bodily reality was institutionalized. Meat-eating was likewise condemned as incompatible with spiritual advancement.”<sup>13</sup> For both the “lay” Sikh and the spiritual leader—the Guru—vegetarianism was the superior lifestyle. A plant-based diet indicated that one was separate from the appalling task of handling decaying flesh. Furthermore, it was “unthinkable that so holy a person as the Guru could have eaten flesh”<sup>14</sup> and, therefore, in the pursuit of religious goals, meat was relinquished. All people wanted to walk closer to their god and be pure. The killing of animals and consumption of their dead bodies could not have been compatible with a walk with god.

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9 Satguru Subramuniyaswami, trans., *Tirukural* (Hauz Khas, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2000), ch. 33.

10 Subramuniyaswami, *Tirukural*, 312, 321.

11 Subramuniyaswami, *Tirukural*, 253.

12 Romesh Dutt, trans., *Mahabharat* (Minneapolis: Fili-Quarian Classics, 2010), 115.47.

13 Eleanor Nesbitt, “The Body in Sikh Tradition,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed., Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 289-305, at 293.

14 Nesbitt, “The Body in Sikh Tradition,” 299.

#### IV. Buddhism and *Ahinsa*

Much like the Hindu philosophy of non-violence, Buddhism also prohibits the killing of animals. In the Buddhist tradition, there is not a personal God who determines salvation at the end of life. Rather the path to *Nirvana*—the extinction of worldly desires—is undertaken alone, under the power of one's own will. Even so, spiritual guidance is found in the Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path, recorded in the *Sutras*. Many of the *Sutras* contain the words and deeds of Siddhartha Gautama- the first person to become enlightened. Also known as “the Buddha” (the Enlightened One), Siddhartha Gautama taught non-violence, among other teachings.

The *Siksha-Samuccaya*, a compendium of Buddhist teachings, gives specific reasons why the eating of meat is reprehensible, the primary of which is found in the section “On Not Eating Meat.” Consumption of animal flesh “hinders deliverance and righteousness.”<sup>15</sup> Since the goal of Buddhism is to extinguish *dukkha* (suffering), one cannot inflict physical pain on another being. Right actions are thought to lead to *Nirvana* but violence, meat eating, and even professions like butchers are not within acceptable practices for Buddhists on their way to spiritual extinction. There are also additional reasons for Buddhist vegetarianism.

Other texts, like the *Lankavatara Sutra*, forbid the eating of meat because it is “wrong” and “improper.”<sup>16</sup> Spiritually, the text prohibits killing and consuming animals because it is evil in this life and also punishable by hell in the next life. The book declares, “He [sic] that eats flesh is in transgression of the words of a sage, the man [sic] of evil mind... those sinners go to the most awful hell.” Much as in Hinduism, earthly actions (*karma*) of Buddhists have post-mortem consequences. The perpetual cycle of life means that deeds done on earth must be accounted for after death. Concern for both the well-being of creatures and the degree of devotion to attaining *Nirvana* are taken into consideration when prohibitions against meat eating are given.

The Buddhist who disregards these teachings on non-violence is assumed to be misguided on their path to liberation. In the section “On Not Eating Meat,” the *Siksha-Samuccaya* warns, “as passion would be an obstacle to deliverance, so would be such things as flesh.”<sup>17</sup> Tradition holds that eating meat fuels sexual and appetitive passions. These cause desire and are a distraction to the spiritual path. In fact, so convinced is the *Siksha-Samuccaya* that abstaining from meat is a universal principle for salvation, it includes all “religious people” in the ranks of those who testify that eating meat is detrimental to spiritual life. The text reads, “By Buddhas and by Bodhisattvas and by religious persons it has been reprehended; if one eats it, he is always born shameless and mad.”<sup>18</sup> For the Buddhist, life in the high pursuit of truth and liberation cannot include the killing of animals. Therefore, to the devout Buddhist, meat eaters are unscrupulous and certainly not spiritually minded.

Hindus and Buddhists do not depend on a god for their afterlife; they must act in accordance with principles that they believe will lead them to their ultimate goal. For Hindus, liberation through *moksha*, or getting off the wheel of reincarnation in order to merge with the Divine is necessary. For Buddhist liberation is also found through *moksha*, but with the spiritual extinction of self in *Nirvana*. In both cases, the law of *karma* influences the position in the afterlife. Killing animals invites deleterious *karma*. However, living a life of non-violence, non-meat eating, and commitment to *ahinsa* brings a better position in the afterlife. The person who eats meat in these religions—even the religious person of another faith—is a stumbling block to liberation and acting contrary to “laws” which are central to the religion.

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15 Ceeli Bendall and William Henry Denham Rouse, trans., *Siksha-Samuccaya* (London: John Murray, 1922), 131.

16 Red Pine, trans., *The Lankavatara Sutra: Translation and Commentary* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 6.22-23.

17 Bendall and Rouse, *Siksha-Samuccaya*, 131.

18 Bendall and Rouse, *Siksha-Samuccaya*, 131.



## Meat in Christianity

It is clear that Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism teach that eating all meat, or certain types of meat are not within the realm of acceptable religious practice. It is therefore surprising, to the observer outside of Christianity, that Christ-followers may eat any food—animal meat or otherwise—of their choosing.

In bold contrast to the other religions of laws or codes, Christianity relies on freedom and grace instead of law. Christianity traces its origins to Judaism, as Jesus and the disciples were observant Jews who followed kosher laws and ritual holidays such as Passover. Yet, Jesus' radical teachings on cleanliness being spiritual and not physical opened the doors for Christian liberty in diet and other matters. Through a reinterpretation of the Jewish cleanliness codes, emphasis was put on the inner disposition of the heart instead of the outer actions of the body.

When Jesus of Nazareth came as the Messiah, the Old Covenant was fulfilled (Matt 5:17) and the New Covenant began. Under the reign of Christ, human salvation was no longer contingent on external rules and practices such as ritual purity that included dietary restriction or ritual sacrifices that killed animals (Mark 7:19-23). Rather, the salvation of humans was based on faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (John 3:16) and trust that he mediates on behalf of humans (Heb 5:10). The liberty, which Jesus Christ brought, included what Christians may with good conscience eat, and therefore all foods became objectively “clean.” Even so, not all food was always considered to be available to Christians theologically. Especially in early Christianity, when kosher Jews were converting to the new faith, dietary restrictions were a contested issue.

### *I. Food in the Acts of the Apostles*

The first of the Jewish apostles to understand that all food, and, therefore, all people were clean was Peter. In Acts 10, Peter was praying on a roof, hungry. He went into a trance (10:9-10) and saw a large sheet containing “all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds” (10:12). What happened next was even more startling than the vision, for “a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat’ ” (10:13). Peter, being a faithful and kosher Jew, replied, “Surely not, Lord!” (10:14). He would not eat the animals that were forbidden to devout Jews. Yet, God spoke to him again through the vision saying, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10:15). As Peter processed the vision, he concluded that God made more than just the meat of animals clean. He made Gentiles clean as well. For this reason, when Peter explains the vision he had to the others, he declares, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). The vision was a heuristic (learning) tool for the Jewish disciples who would bring the Gospel to Gentiles and pagans. It seems that the vision was interpreted in part literally from the beginning of the early church, since the very first council of the Christian church—the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15—retained kosher injunctions.

One of the next episodes recorded in Acts laid the foundation for the next phase in the early church: the reconsideration of the Levitical code of cleanliness. In Acts 15, Christians rejected the compendium of cleanliness laws, but also sought to institute some guidelines for early Christians. Without wanting to be too burdensome, they decided that Gentile Christians were to “abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29). These prohibitions facilitate the greatest Christian liberty. Jews, as well as pagan converts to Christianity who followed Jesus, were grappling with issues of tolerance, multiculturalism, and pluralism in their day; there are many similarities to today. Even after the council of Jerusalem, the church still had questions about dietary choice and sexual morality. These issues were explained in Paul's epistles.

Still seeking guidance in their new home-churches, early Christian leaders wrote to the apostle Paul, who responded in his epistles to various churches. Paul took up the issue of diet (among other issues) in 1 Corinthians and concluded that even though Christians can accept all food as clean, it

does not follow that all meat should be eaten, because there is a law that is higher than liberty, and that law is love (see John 13:34-35).

## II. Paul's Texts on Food

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul summarizes the theology of Christian liberty. He writes, “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive.” This proverb comes after Paul’s elaborations on food sacrifices to idols (ch. 8) and precedes his example of Christian conscientiousness (ch. 10).

1 Corinthians 8 describes the conundrum that many Christians were facing: could one eat meat scarified to pagan idols? Diving into the issue at hand, the apostle concludes that, with matters of liberty in consumption of foods, “if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall” (1 Cor 8:13). That is, even though one person may feel like it is theologically acceptable to eat certain types of food, if another person does not, then it is better that the “stronger” of the two cater to the “weaker” person and meet them where they are.

Applied to the mission field, it seems that Paul agrees that what Christians eat does not make them more or less holy, but, if what we eat causes disdain from non-Christians, or even contempt from Christians who have modified their diet to accommodate the “weak” principles of other religions, then we should be willing to go our whole lives never putting a morsel of “contemptible” food in our mouths. Paul urges the Christians that, if they desire the salvation of all people, they should relinquish their rights in order to become more appealing to the culture they are in.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, making an effort to integrate into a culture or situation is the next part of Paul’s argument.

In the next chapter, Paul writes, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). While adamantly defending the rights of an apostle and servant of Christ, and vigorously asserting that he answers to no one but Christ, Paul voluntarily abdicates his rights, privileges, and freedom in order to reach nonbelievers. As Christians, we have every right to eat that which we believe is acceptable to eat, but, as witnesses to the Kingdom, we may surrender our right so that others may be attracted to Christ. Though freedom came with salvation, the debt of love is never paid off (Rom 13:8).

Paul continues in his epistle with an example of a person trying to share the Gospel (1 Cor 10:26-30). The individual in this scenario is essentially a missionary—a Christian in a non-Christian setting—living in a culture where some people feel compelled to have dietary restrictions of not eating certain meat. In support of Christian freedom, the apostle quotes Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it” (1 Cor 10:26). But, in refutation, Paul counters, “But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience (1 Cor 10:28). Paul clarifies the phrase “conscience’s sake” by adding, “I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?” (10:29). In other words, Paul would say in Jewish or Islamic terms, “Why should I avoid the meat of certain animals if I know that all animals are kosher and *halal* for me to eat?” and of Hindu or Buddhist precepts, “Why should I give up meat if I don’t think that I have to live by the rule of *ahimsa*?”

Paul answers his own question from verse 29. In a gesture of *agape* love, Paul pronounces that he will indeed let “his freedom be judged by another’s conscience,” because he does not want to “cause anyone to stumble” (1 Cor 10:32). Paul would rather adapt his eating habits to the customs of the non-Christian culture he is in rather than have a potential believer be repulsed by him and his dietary habits, and, therefore, the faith. The apostle’s example to Christians desiring the salvation of others is

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note here that we are not dealing with Christians vacillating over a *moral* issue. It should never be suggested that if a culture practiced child sacrifice or some other abomination that Christians should follow along. The issue of eating flesh from animals is premoral—that is, void of either positive or negative morality in and of itself. It gets its morality from the context and situation that the food is presented in.

precisely what missionaries must be willing to emulate in refraining from the meats that are forbidden in other religions. Christians abstain not because we believe that these foods are unclean or violent, but *for the sake of others* because “no one should seek their own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor 10:24). Christian love trumps Christian liberty. This is among “the greatest commandments” (Matt 22:37-40).

### Experiences from the Mission Field

Some missionaries have already discovered the evangelistic benefits of switching to a meat-free diet while witnessing in cultures that do not permit meat eating. Others have found that they had to modify their already vegetarian lifestyle to accommodate others who felt their hospitality offended when these missionaries refused animal flesh. Context is key, and, even though these stories come from missionaries abroad, I believe that modifying one’s diet to fit the culture applies as much to the American in a multi-cultural city as it does to a missionary in a country overseas.

#### *I. From Carnivore to Herbivore in Hindu India*

One woman who works in India pointed out that to me “all the Christians (she knows in her area of India) eat meat,” which puts her, as a vegetarian witnessing to Hindus and Muslims, in an “awkward position.”<sup>20</sup> Some Christians, having the “right” to eat meat, feel it is their obligation to eat meat so as to distinguish themselves from Hindus and Muslims. But missionary work is not merely about presenting Christianity as distinct from Hinduism or Islam. Rather, laying a common ground in order to expedite future fellowship and possible conversion is also a missional objective.

My colleague serving in the Indian culture says that her vegetarianism makes her more relatable to the Hindus and Muslims, but when she is staying with other Christians they expect her to eat meat. This presents a conflict of interest for her and sets up a false dichotomy of what is expected of Christians. While Christians may choose to eat meat, when practices of hospitality and meal-sharing are a means of witness, one does not want to risk offending the person to whom one is witnessing by serving food that is prohibited. Of course, it is not always the situation that Christians are witnessing in a vegetarian-oriented culture, especially when Protestants go into Catholic countries.<sup>21</sup>

#### *II. From Herbivore to Carnivore in Catholic Paraguay*

Missionaries in South America, for instance, have pointed out that, because the continent is predominantly Catholic, it can be offensive or rude not to eat meat that is being served by a host family of a different denomination. Indeed, another missionary to Paraguay *stopped* being a vegetarian in order to fit in better with the culture. She says that she started eating meat because it “helped the people to tangibly see that I was not rejecting an important staple in their diet and culture.”<sup>22</sup> The point here, then, is not that all Christians must adopt *halal* or *ahinsa* eating habits, but that their love of neighbor is considered first when they make cultural choices as ambassadors of Christ.

Beyond those witnessing to believers in the major religions of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, there are a growing number of non-Christian, non-religious vegetarians that Christians associate with. In many industrialized countries, non-religious environmental scientists, animal-rights groups, and those concerned with healthy eating are turning away from meat.<sup>23</sup> These people perceive Christians who eat meat as detrimental to the environment, cruel to animals, and hastening

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20 Personal communication, September 06, 2009.

21 Many Christians regard all Christian branches—Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant—as equally accessing Christian salvation if they adhere to salvation through the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and Lord and Savior, but other organizations do send Protestants to Catholic countries. Therefore, I relay this anecdote not as a judgment that Catholics need to be “saved,” but rather as a reality that some Christians are sent to witness to other Christians.

22 Personal communication, September 13, 2009.

23 Atheist ethicist Peter Singer is perhaps the best known of these vegetarian leaders. His book *Animal Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975) spurred modern awareness of the conditions of animals raised for slaughter, among other issues important to those who care for animals.

the demise of their body. They are offended that a Christian who preaches stewardship could harm the environment through consuming factory farmed cows that are a huge contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. They are appalled that a Christian who adheres to love and non-violence could kill a sentient chicken or sheep. And they are put off that Christians who claim that our physical bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) would consume animal products that lead to heart disease, contribute to obesity, and are highly processed.

In contrast, when non-religious vegetarians meet a vegetarian Christian, they are shocked into conversation; this can lead to friendship and conversion.<sup>24</sup> When Christians relinquish their liberties to meat eating, and witness to those with no religious affiliation, they are afforded more respect and doors of communication are opened. Sacrificial love puts one’s own desires below those of a sister or brother in need. The heart of missions is love of other. Part of the cultural adaptation which many missionaries make include modifying styles of dress, language, and foregoing the luxuries of modernity. Diet should be the same way.

Does this mean that, once a convert is made, one might switch one’s diet back to meat eating (or vegetarianism, depending on the context)? I would say not. Our work is never done while on earth, and I would consider that, as one moves through the pluralistic, interconnected world, that maintaining a vegetarian diet will act as a tremendous witness to the majority of people who are not Christians.

### **Conclusion: “All Things to All People?”**

Jesus adapted to a culture he was ministering in order to reach unbelievers. Through parables about common people, plants, and animals, Jesus constructed lessons that could be understood. When Jesus performed miracles, he often employed the elements of his surroundings—bread and fish from a child; mud from the ground. The amenability of Jesus illuminates the path for missionaries who also want to be beacons of light to those who are in the darkness.

The conclusion of Jesus’ time on earth was invested in training disciples—female and male to spread the Good News of salvation and freedom to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:19). Christians are reaching an exciting time in missions where translations of the Bible are being made into dialects that have never seen the Word of God. The 10-40 window<sup>25</sup> is targeted and systematically being penetrated by devout followers of Christ who burn to spread the Gospel to non-Christians. It would be folly to make such an impediment to the Gospel as the eating of meat by the missionaries who go to serve these regions.

Food is of the utmost primacy to life—one cannot live long without eating. Food is the language and expression of cultural and religious significance. Food is a common bond among all humans. Christians are at liberty to eat whatever they feel is “permissible” for them—that is part of their freedom in Christ. But, for the sake of our non-Christian brothers and sisters, let us become “all things to all people” for the glory of God and enter into a meat-free life while we witness to those who do not eat meat.

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<sup>24</sup> I speak here from my own experience as a vegetarian of over 20 years living in California, Seattle, Colorado and Boston. Each of these cities have non-religious vegetarian communities that rarely hear the Gospel. Meeting a Christian who does not eat meat gives a point of contact that makes the Christian life appealing. We cannot underestimate this way of presenting Christ.

<sup>25</sup> The area on the map within 10-40 degrees latitude which has the most non-Christians out of any other area in the world.

# The Restorative Nature of Exile: Reforming God's People to Continue the Work of the Lord

MEGAN E. LIETZ<sup>1</sup>

“Scripture is the story of the restoration of a lost *shalom*.” – Rev. Dr. David Gushee

The present state of the world is a far cry from where God intended it to be. Rampant with injustice, inequality, and violence, it does not reflect the *shalom* God desires for creation. Despite this, the Lord does not intend for it to fall into abject poverty. On the contrary, from the very creatures that marred the relationship between Creator and creation, God chose a people to partner with him in the journey of restoration. In making a covenant with Abraham, hope was born, and his descendants were chosen to usher in holistic salvation.

As heirs of Abraham's promise, the Church bears the responsibility to work towards *shalom* throughout creation. While some congregations are actively transforming their communities, the Church in North America does not always have the impact it could as a counter-cultural force that brings Christ-likeness to every sphere. This is due in part to many congregations having an incomplete understanding of the mission to which they have been called, specifically in the area of social engagement.<sup>2</sup> Understanding the church's role in restoring *shalom* to every area of society is critical to living out faithfully the gospel today. As Eldin Villafañe, founder of Gordon-Conwell's Center for Urban Ministerial Education, writes in *Seek the Peace of the City*, “As we enter the twenty-first century, there is no greater need for evangelicals in the cities than to articulate, in both word and deed, a social spirituality. The twin phenomena of urbanization and globalization, which define the ethos of our great cities, demand no more and no less than an authentically biblical spirituality. If the whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world, it must be a ‘wholistic’ spirituality.”<sup>3</sup>

One way to expand a biblical spirituality and support a holistic praxis is by contemplating Jeremiah 29:4-9. It reveals God's desire for his people to be agents of community transformation and offers directives that can be applied to the Church today. This article examines the Lord's charge in Jeremiah 29:4-9 and considers how God used punishment to restore Judah so they would reassume their divine mandate for generations to come. It concludes with practical applications for ministry. By considering Judah's experience, churches can recognize the value of community engagement, produce more effective agents of holistic salvation, and usher *shalom* into their community.

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1 This paper was written with the guidance and support of Dr. Jim Critchlow. The research for this paper began in his “Old Testament Prophetic Books” class at Gordon-Conwell's Center for Urban Ministerial Education and was formed into the present work following the author's conclusion of the class. The author is most grateful for Dr. Critchlow's encouragement and assistance.

2 In speaking on the church's limited view of the gospel and struggle to live it out, Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, writes: “The kingdom of which Christ spoke was one in which... justice was to become a reality, first in the hearts and minds of Jesus' followers, and then to the wider society through their influence... [It] was intended to change and challenge everything in our fallen world in the here and now... But this does not seem to square with the 21st century view of the Gospel... we have reduced the gospel from a dynamic and beautiful symphony of God's love for and in the world to a bare and strident monotone... in doing so we have also stripped it of much of its power to change not only the human heart but the world.” In subsequent chapters, especially parts three and four, he chronicles social needs how the church could be more active in fighting issues like poverty, discrimination, and disease. While Stearns focuses on serving on an international scale, his work corroborates the need to serve locally as well.

3 Eldin Villafañe et al., *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 9, accessed July 2014, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=ZJl6hkZhCbKc&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA12>.



## I - Jeremiah 29:4-9: The Process of Restoration

Jeremiah 29:4-7 was written to the Judean exiles following the first deportation (605 B.C.E.), to provide clarity and instructions for how to seek *shalom*. Although called to be a transformative force, the Judeans did not faithfully carry out God's work when they encountered socio-historical contexts that made it difficult to follow the Lord. Surrounded by beliefs contrary to the faith to which they had been called, instead of trusting in God and obeying his law, they found security in conforming to the nations around them. As a result, they compromised their ability to bring forth God's restorative work and became like the nations who did not know God.

Through the prophets, YHWH made his people aware of their disobedience and made many attempts to draw them back to him. Despite this, the Judeans continued in disobedience, making evident that they were unwilling to obey God's covenant and continue the restorative work of the Lord. As a result, God brought punishment upon his people (Josh. 24:19-20): enacting the prescribed consequences of violating the covenant. This punishment came in the form of the Exile, separating God's people from the Promised Land (Lev. 26:32-33; Deut. 4:25-27; 28:63).

Following the invasion, Jeremiah proclaimed that the Exile would be long. Hopeful for a brief exile, however, the people and false prophets - most notably Hananiah - publically opposed him (Jer. 26-28). Jeremiah 29:4-9 affirms that there would be no imminent return and offers instructions on how to find *shalom* in a foreign land. By walking in obedience, the people would be restored as they developed the character and perspective needed to be faithful in accomplishing the work to which they had been called.

### *Jeremiah 29:4 - God Is the One Sending*

"Thus says YHWH of Hosts, God of Israel, to the exiles, who I exiled from Jerusalem." - Jeremiah 29:4<sup>4</sup>

While at first glance, immersing God's people in the very culture from which they failed to be set apart may seem counter-productive, Jeremiah 29:4 indicates that the Exile was not merely the result of socio-historical events, but the plan of a sovereign God. This would have been a crucial and comforting word to the exiles. They would have feared that, having been removed from the land, itself a sign of their covenantal relationship, they also had been rejected by the Lord. God's agency in the situation is clearly communicated through the title "Lord of Hosts," a term expressing that he is ruler of the heavenly hosts and has all creation at his command for his military purposes.<sup>5</sup> Although the Israelites were likely to feel that the impossible had happened, and that recent events were in violation of the will of God, the Lord affirmed the contrary: while the truth went against Judah's self-made expectations, the people were indeed in the hands of a sovereign God. Furthermore, the causative form of *galah*, *higlētī*, "to (carry away into) exile," indicates that not only did the Lord allow Babylonian victory - he caused it on account of Judah's disobedience (hiphil perfect 1cs).<sup>6</sup> This is affirmed by verses like Jeremiah 25:9 and 27:6 which state that, although Nebuchad-ezzar is the one who physically carried the Judeans into exile (Jer. 27:20 and

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4 Note that all translations of Jeremiah 29:4-9 were translated by the author by considering both the Masoretic Text and Septuagint.

5 This is made clear in 1 Sam 17:45 (NRSV) that equates "the name of the Lord of Hosts" with "the God of the armies of Israel." It is also supported by 1 Sam 4:4 that refers to the Ark of the Covenant as the "the Ark of the Covenant of Lord of Hosts" (NRSV). The covenant was associated with military actions because the Israelites believed that the Ark was the throne from which the Lord would lead his children into battle and unto victory (1 Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:2). The association of "the Lord of Hosts" with military action is further supported in Ps 28:8 and 10 where "YHWH of hosts," is used alongside the titles "YHWH strong and mighty," "the mighty warrior," and "the king of glory".

6 This interpretation is supported by the fact that the two other instances when *galah* is used in the hiphil is in reference to God's people being taken into exile, first by Tilgath-pilneser to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29), and then by King Nebuchad-ezzar to Babylon (Jer. 27:20). In both instances, the Lord makes clear through his prophets that the Exile is on account of a breach of the covenant, on account of their many sins. Its single use in the Hophal is under similar circumstances (Jer. 40:1).

29:1), he is only an agent in God's greater plan. Ultimately, YHWH is the one who uprooted his people, but, as the rest of the passage reveals, this is so they can be agents of *shalom* (Jer. 29:14).

***Jeremiah 29:5-6 - God Sent His People into the Culture from Which They Were to Be Set Apart***

“Build houses and live and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and bear sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands so they may bear sons and daughters and become numerous and not decrease.” -

Jeremiah 29:5-6

In providing directions for how to live in exile, Jeremiah makes clear that the journey will be long, but as God's people engage in their new communities, there will be a measure of restoration. The length of the Exile is communicated through the instructions to build houses, plant gardens, get married, and have children. These activities take time. They cannot be accomplished in the brief period that Hananiah predicted (Jer. 28:6-14), or even in a single lifetime. Though the exiles may have wanted to think they could be excused from these instructions and escape the daunting reality they implied, the directions are given in the imperative, indicating that they are actions the Lord is not suggesting, not even asking, but *commanding* his people to obey. In no uncertain terms, the Lord was confirming the message of Jeremiah: the false prophets are wrong, the Exile will be long, and God's people must face punishment for their actions. As difficult as it would have been to hear, it was imperative for the Judeans to understand this so they could correct their perspective and settle into a foreign land.

Not only does Jeremiah 29:4-6 communicate the length of the Exile, but it makes clear that, during this time, God's people are to engage with the community around them. In Deuteronomy 20:5-7b, building a new home, having recently planted a vineyard, or being engaged was reason to be excused from military service.<sup>7</sup> This indicates that building, planting, and marrying are actions that were valued elements of daily life. In essence, Jeremiah is telling the exiles to “settle down,”<sup>8</sup> “make themselves at home,”<sup>9</sup> and engage in the life of this foreign community. These actions would require God's people to participate in the economic, agricultural, and social spheres of different nations<sup>10</sup> and continue daily life among Gentiles who did not follow the law. This would have seemed unusual, since God had previously instructed his people to be set apart from and, at times, even destroy foreign nations. However, it is imperative to understand that such instructions were not a proclamation that cross-cultural encounters were sinful per se, but a protective action against idolatry and preparatory step towards obtaining the Promised Land. This conclusion is affirmed in the next verse (29:7) when the Lord commands his people to pray<sup>11</sup> for the city of Babylon. Other than David's call in Psalm 122:6, it was unprecedented in recorded literature for God's people to pray on behalf of a foreign power.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, the Lord was shifting the paradigm and inviting his people to engage with the foreigner so they could be exemplars and agents of positive change.

At the same time that God's commands would have been discouraging to a displaced Israel, they communicated hope in exile. This is found in recognizing that Jeremiah 29:5-7 is written as a

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7 William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 141. It has been suggested that v. 6 is quoting Deut. 20:5-10 that offered these activities as reasons for exemption from military service, thus subtly suggesting that the Judean people were not to rebel.

8 Jer. 29:5 (NIV).

9 Jer. 29:5 (MSG).

10 Not only would the Israelites be surrounded by Babylonian culture, but they would be exposed to the cultures of the many people groups whom Babylon had taken captive and forced to work in their land.

11 God wasn't simply asking his people to pray for their captors once, but to pray repeatedly, as indicated by the word's hithpa'el form.

12 Nolan B. Harmon, “Jeremiah,” in *Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah*, vol. 5, The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 787.

promise oracle.<sup>13</sup> A promise oracle is a feature of prophetic sayings, identified by pairs of logically connected imperatives, in which the Lord promises a measure of success when heeded. An example of a similar and related promise oracle is Genesis 1:28, commanding people to multiply.<sup>14</sup> As this expresses God's will, those walking in obedience will be granted success. A promise of success in these areas was most significant, as Deuteronomy 28 makes clear that abundance of offspring and produce were blessings which would follow obedience to the covenant (v. 11), but be suspended by disobedience (vv. 30, 31, 49-52; Jer. 5:15-17). The fact that God tells his people to build, plant, marry, and have children<sup>15</sup> is encouraging, because it implies that the Israelites are not under the covenant curses that brought them to the land. Rather, through obedience, they are able to receive covenant blessings.<sup>16</sup> Most significantly, this would communicate that, though outside the land of blessing, though removed from the sign of the covenant that was their home, God's people are still under the covenant and can be blessed as they live in a foreign land.

### *Jeremiah 29:7 – God Gives a Charge for Cultural Transformation*

“But, seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city to which I exiled you and pray on its behalf to YHWH, because in its welfare [*shalom*], there will be welfare [*shalom*] for you.” - Jeremiah 29:7

Jeremiah 29:7 reveals the fulfillment of the promise oracle and highlights the key instructions that, when obeyed, result in covenant blessings: “seek the *shalom* of the city...because in its *shalom*, there will be *shalom* for you.” In verse four, Jeremiah makes clear that, on account of their disobedience, his people were subject to punishment and the Lord himself was caused to carry them into exile. With the word “but,”<sup>17</sup> however, the prophet contrasts the long exile with the hope that the captive Judeans can improve their situation through obedience. Though their punishment had become inevitable after a time, their agency was returned and the onus was now on them to experience restoration. With this in mind, the Lord commands them to seek the *shalom* of the city. Again, this is an imperative command that calls his people to be who he created them to be and to restore God's intended order.

*Shalom* is a word that, though often understood as “peace,” far transcends the meaning of peace in the English language. Though it captures this understanding, the Hebrew word is used in a number of different ways, allowing it to be translated as welfare, completeness, rest, security, prosperity, wholeness, and/or victory. *Shalom*, in the context of Jeremiah 29:7, is used to refer to peaceful relationships between groups (1 Kings 5:12, Judg. 4:17) and individuals (Jer. 20:10). Most analogous to the English understanding of “peace,” this captures the idea of the absence of conflict (Deut. 20:10-12, Josh. 9:15; 10:1), but it extends beyond it to include the presence of completeness, wholeness, and harmony. It indicates not only the lack of hostility, but the presence of harmonious relationships (Gen. 34:21; Zech. 6:13).

The prophets affirm that *shalom* extends beyond right political relationships to righteousness and justice. For example, the false prophets proclaimed *shalom* and identified God's salvation

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13 Gerald Lynwood Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, eds., *Jeremiah 26-52* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 67. Other examples of promise oracles include 1 Kings 22:12, 15; 2 Kings 5:10, 13; Jer. 27:12, 17.

14 This is supported by the fact that the following verse, Genesis 1:29, speaks of how the Lord will provide the resources that would be needed to sustain the fulfillment of the command.

15 The call to “increase, do not decrease” recalls the creation mandate of Gen. 1:28, as well as God's promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore (Gen 15:15). These are all pivotal times, new beginnings, in which God's people were called to engage in his covenant work. Multiplication ceased during times of disobedience (Deut. 28:41), so God's call indicated that the covenant curse had been lifted and, if obedient, they could receive covenant blessings instead (Deut. 28:11).

16 Similarly, the fact that the exiles were encouraged to pray (v. 7) and told that they would be heard (v.10) shows an opening of the ears of God, which had previously been stopped up on account of Judah's disobedience (e.g. Jer. 11:11, 14:11).

17 The translation choice of the author. This is affirmed by the ESV.

with political stability (Jer. 6:14, 14:13, 28; Ezek. 13:16; Mic. 3:5), but the true prophets preached vehemently against this. They spoke of doom on account of injustice (Amos 5:21-24; Jer. 22:1-15) and declared that *shalom* would only come when justice is done (Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-9). They clarified that God is the source of all peace (1 Kings 2:33, Mic. 4:4-5) and that, regardless of the political situation, true *shalom* is connected to justice and flows from righteousness (32:17). This close connection is affirmed in Isaiah 54:13-14: “I will teach all your children, and they will enjoy great peace [*shalom*]. You will be secure under a government that is just and fair. Your enemies will stay far away. You will live in peace and terror will not come near.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Zechariah 8:16-19, peace, truth and justice are parallel terms, thus connecting *shalom* with true justice. *Shalom*, therefore, cannot be achieved if people are walking in unrighteousness (Isa. 48:18). As we fulfill our covenant promise with God, *shalom* is the result (Gen. 26:30ff; 1 Kings 5:26; Isa. 44:10; Job 5:23). Therefore, when God is asking his people to seek the *shalom* of the city, he is not only telling them to refrain from violent action, but also to foster holistic well-being. He is instructing them to bring forth righteousness, justice, and a state that reflects God’s right order of things: to restore the community to what the Lord intended it to be.

Because seeking *shalom* would require<sup>19</sup> obedience to the covenant,<sup>20</sup> this process would serve to reform the Judeans and re-align their hearts and actions with the Lord’s. Disobedience had led to the degeneration of God’s people and had caused them to be exiled, but obedience would restore both a people and their land.<sup>21</sup> The Exile was God’s means of teaching his people to do what they had failed to do before: live out the covenant in the midst of contrary cultures, in such a way that they would not conform to society, but would transform it into the likeness of the Lord.

God instructs his people to accompany this formidable task with prayer. Though previously, God’s ears had been closed to their petitions on account of their disobedience (e.g. Jer. 11:11; 14:11), he now asks his people to pray unto restoration. As indicated by *palal*’s hithpael form, *hitpallo*, God wasn’t only asking his people to pray for their captors once, but to pray repeatedly. Persistent prayer would be an effective tool with which God’s people were to usher *shalom* into a hostile community. This recalls Solomon’s interaction with God, surrounding the consecration of the temple (2 Chron. 6 - 7), where both the dangers of disobedience and the power of prayer were set forth. The promise the Lord gave then would find fulfillment in the action of the exiles: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). Through prayer, *shalom* becomes a reality.

### ***Jeremiah 29:8 – 9 – God Warns Against the Mistakes of the Past***

“For thus says YHWH of Hosts, God of Israel. Do not (let) your prophets, who are among you, or your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams which you are causing [yourselves] to dream, because, with a lie, they are prophesying to you in my name. I have not sent them declares the Lord!” - Jeremiah 29:8-9

<sup>18</sup> Isa. 54:13-14 (NLT).

<sup>19</sup> William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: Reading the Prophet in His Time and Ours* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 110. The conditional nature of their *shalom* is supported by the fact that letters of the period would begin with an address, mentioning the name of the recipient, followed by a greeting that would often speak of *shalom*. The address is found in the last part of verse 4, but the greeting, or more accurately, the greeting substitute, is not found until verse 7. This implies that the *shalom*, usually offered from the start, would not be so readily available. Rather, it would come through seeking the peace of the city and praying for a foreign land.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Ellis Benson, Malinda Elizabeth Berry, and Peter Heltzel, *Prophetic Evangelicals: Envisioning a Just and Peaceable Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012), 65. “God established laws for Israel that in numerous ways codify respect for the sanctification of human life and are designed to ensure social justice and human well-being....Social justice and peace depend on acknowledgement of God and obedience to God’s will”.

<sup>21</sup> Op. Cit., 70. “...*shalom* means obedience to God – which is, in fact, its pre-condition. For the prophets, disobedience is the source of Israel’s sufferings, and obedience will therefore be the source of Israel’s healing – and the healing of the world.”

The passage concludes with God admonishing his people not to listen to the lies of the false prophets, which had been shaped by the hopes of the people, but to heed the counter-cultural revelation of the Lord. Throughout the Bible, false prophets presented a divergent view that did not speak God's truth into the situation, but instead told the people what they wanted to hear (2 Chron. 18:5-7). This is also emphasized through the Hebrew of Jeremiah 29:8-9.

Detailing the deception of the diviners and false prophets, a literal translation of verse 8b reads, "and do not listen to *your* dreams which *you are causing* to dream." While one would expect the text to read, "their dreams," which "they" are causing you to dream, this is not the case. The second person plural form of dreams indicates that the messages of the false prophets are, in fact, the dreams of the people and the hiphil masculine plural participle indicates that the people themselves are the cause. This wording highlights how the message of the false prophets are both shaped by and reflect the hopes of the people, not the counter-cultural revelation of God.

The passages' conclusion, "...because, with a lie, they are prophesying to you in my name. I have not sent them, declares the Lord!" makes clear that the words of the false prophets are lies that are not to be followed. If they are followed, God's people cannot be successful in fulfilling the Lord's command to seek *shalom*. Furthermore, such lies had contributed to the people of Judah being led into exile (Jer. 27:15). Now that the Judeans had a fresh start and were being reformed into what God intended, the Lord was offering a strong warning so they would not fall prey again. God did not desire false prophets who conformed to the culture, but a distinctive people who would take a prophetic stance, speak God's truth into a situation, and create a culture of *shalom*.

### Summary and Implications for the Early Church

The descendants of Abraham were chosen to be God's agents in the restoration of creation through obedience to the covenant. In adverse situations, however, instead of trusting God, they violated the law by entering into alliances with foreign nations and worshipping other gods. As a result, instead of living by a godly standard, setting an example,<sup>22</sup> and transforming their environment with God-fearing lives, they conformed to the thoughts and behaviors of the nations that the Lord drove out. Not only did they abandon their calling as God's restorative agents, but, in spiraling deep into depravity, they countered the will and work of the Lord. YHWH was grieved, and his people deserved death for their disobedience. Through the Exile, God graciously stepped in and saved them from themselves.

The Exile not only served to punish God's people for their sins, but to return their hearts to the Lord so they could be agents of holistic salvation. 2 Chronicles 34:24-25 and chapter 36 make clear that the Exile came about on account of Judah's violation of the covenant. Though the cause was disheartening, the effect would be restoration that glorified the Lord. This occurred through YHWH leading his people into a world where, in order to find *shalom* for themselves, they would have to learn how to do that which they had failed to do before: follow God in the midst of Gentiles who did not obey the Lord. It is in this that the "good fig, bad fig" analogy<sup>23</sup> of Jeremiah 24 finds fulfillment.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Note that, when Jeroboam's sin is referenced, it is often not only mentioned that he committed idolatry, but also that he led others into idolatry as well. This highlights the importance of being an example and how God was especially grieved that the Israelites led others into sin.

23 In Jeremiah 24, God grants the prophet a vision in which he sees two baskets of figs, one with good figs and the other with figs so bad that they cannot be eaten. The Lord explains that the good figs represent the exiles who, though cast out from Jerusalem, will be watched over and return to their land. The bad figs represent the Judeans who remained in Jerusalem. They would be made into a mockery and destroyed. This is surprising because the holy land came to represent God's covenant relationship with his people and it was expected that those who were in the land would be blessed, not those who were cast out from it.

24 James R. Critchlow, *Looking Back for Jehoiachin: Yahweh's Cast-out Signet* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 17, 31. The author of this present article, Lietz, posits that, since the health of a king reflects the health of his people, the fulfillment of this prophecy is foreshadowed in a comparison between Zedekiah, puppet king in Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin, the young king led into exile. Critchlow provides the following support: Jeremiah 37:2 says that Zedekiah did not pay any



Against all expectations, those who were taken into exile were the ones favored and restored.

The restoration that took place as a result of the Exile was pivotal in equipping God's people with the character and perspective to continue God's work throughout the generations. The ability to be a positive force in the midst of divergent cultures was a key quality that sustained and defined the early church. 1 Peter 2:11-12 exhorts:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. (NRSV)

The ability to conduct oneself in a God-honoring way in the midst of other cultures would be indispensable for the Gentile mission and the endurance of the persecuted Church. They are seen in one of the earliest Christian apologetics (ca. 150-225 C.E., written anonymously), describing how the early church was interacting with the world:

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by our country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life...But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual characteristic of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like everyone else, have children, but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food, but not their wives. They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on Earth, but their citizenship is in Heaven.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that the Church was living in the world, but not of it. The apologetic goes on to explain that the Christians were living out their faith, despite persecution, in the cities of the world. Contrary to the Judeans prior to exile, the early Church stood firm in its faith amidst undoubtedly different cultures. Christians did not conform to the world around them, but transformed it.

This ability to accomplish God's work amidst foreign influences was restored through the Exile. By requiring the exiles to honor the Lord while living in Babylonian society and seek the *shalom* of the city, God not only enabled his people to bring *shalom* to their captors and themselves, but he also imbued them with vital characteristics. Accompanied by biblical mandates to remember the Lord and what he has done for them (e.g., Deut. 6:6-9; Josh. 4:5-7), these lessons would have been passed down to future generations, positioning them to continue the work of the Lord. Therefore, if it were not for the Exile, God's people would not have been prepared to leave their rich legacy nor carry the good news to Judea, Samaria, and the very ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8).

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attention to the warning of Jeremiah; 2 Chron. 36:1 affirms "he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against the Lord." All the lead priests and people are portrayed as being "exceedingly unfaithful, following the abominations of the nations, polluting the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem" (17). In the end, Zedekiah and his family are violently deposed, being overtaken by the rebellion of their own devising. Jehoiachin, on the other hand, was redeemed by his release (2 Kings 25:27-30, Jer. 52:31-34) and is hailed as the penultimate Judean King, suggesting a rehabilitation of Jehoiachin prior to his death. I theorize that this parallels the rehabilitation that the Exile would bring to God's people.

25 Bryan P. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 18.

## II – Implications and Application for the Church Today

### *The Church Is Not to Conform to the World Around It, but Be a Prophetic Voice, Seeking God's Shalom for Its Communities*

Not unlike the exiles, the Church today has assumed the vices of the world and incorporated them into the culture of its communities. As much as the Church likes to consider itself “set apart,” few would argue that the inequality, segregation, consumerism, materialism, and ruthless independence which characterize the secular world are absent from congregations.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, through systemic injustice and corporate sin, by simply participating in fallen systems, Christians sustain and compound the devastating effects of iniquity. With challenges like limited resources, vying priorities, and a desire to be relevant, the Church too often leaves realities that militate *shalom* unchallenged, both within their congregations and the world.

As demonstrated through the people of Judah, such conformity can tarnish the testimony of God's people and compromise the work of God. While some level of conformity is appropriate,<sup>27</sup> too often, the Church becomes occupied with ungodly concerns, comfortable in its complacency, and driven by the societal and cultural relevance that is often valued over the transcendent mission of God. As a result, churches either forget their role as bearers of *shalom* or pursue it only within the realm of personal salvation. When speaking of contemporary and creative reconstructions of evangelism, Dr. Bryan Stone, Professor of Evangelism at Boston University, writes:

While these reconstructions have triumphed in making the church more relevant to the tastes, expectations, preferences, and quest for self-fulfillment of both the un-churched and the de-churched, they have utterly failed to challenge the racism, individualism, violence and affluence of western culture. They in no way subvert an existing unjust order, but rather mimic and sustain it.<sup>28</sup>

While understandable, such behavior is not acceptable. It reflects an incomplete view of the Church's call and bridles its God-given ability to bring healing and restoration to a broken world.

As a result, the Church must be intentional not only to work towards the salvation of the individual, but also strive for the counter-cultural transformation of its communities. It is in doing this that it will usher holistic salvation into every sphere. The 1974 Lausanne Covenant from the International Congress on World Evangelization affirms that this is a responsibility of the Christian community:

God is both the creator and judge of all men. We therefore share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression... . The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression, and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.<sup>29</sup>

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26 Soong-Chan Rah, “Part One: The Western, White Cultural Captivity of the Church,” in *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88-91.

27 E.g., conforming to laws and social regulations, orienting the ministry to address the needs of one's unique context, etc.

28 Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), Electronic, Introduction.

29 Bruce Ellis Benson, Malinda Elizabeth Berry, and Peter Heltzel, *Prophetic Evangelicals*, 18.

Therefore, the Church must eliminate the dichotomy between personal salvation and the salvation of society. It must embrace an integrated faith that sees the bearing of *shalom* in all areas as the responsibility of every believer, and an integral part of the sanctification process itself.

Not until the Church works not only for the absence of violence and injustice, but also for the presence of peace and equality, will it be faithful to the commands of its exemplar, Jesus Christ. Perry Yoder, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, articulates this well:

We are tempted at times to think that peacekeeping is maintaining the status quo without conflict, but our study of *shalom* shows us that peacemaking is whitewashing when we think we can have peace in spite of oppression, exploitation and unjust laws...The Biblical understanding of peace...points positively to things being as they should be; when things are not that way, no amount of security, no amount of peacekeeping in the sense of law and order and public tranquility will make for peace. Only a change in the way things are will allow *shalom*... to be realized. Only a transformation of society so that things really are all right will make for biblical peace.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Shalom Requires That the Church Engage in the Communities in Which It Wants to See Transformation***

*Shalom* is obtained through engaging in the community. As the Judeans were commanded to continue daily life in the midst of Babylonian society and participate in its social and economic structures, so must churches today engage in their communities. This requires an incarnational approach in which the Church dwells among the people and works with them to utilize what is already taking place for constructive change. As John Howard Yoder notes: “The primary social structure through which the Gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the Church must interact with the secular society in order to bring Christ-centered change. Stanley Hauerwas affirms, “I assume that the church is at her missionary best when she does those things that make her a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. From time to time she may find it useful to send out missionaries, but her first missionary task is to be a witness in and to the world in which she finds herself. All missionary tasks are in that sense local.”<sup>32</sup>

The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)<sup>33</sup> speaks of the importance of engaging with the community through one of its primary values: “relocating” to the community in which one serves. Though some may argue that physically living in the community is not always possible or necessary to make positive change, others argue that one must be actively involved at the least. The CCDA explains its reasoning:

By relocating, a person will understand most clearly the real problems facing the poor; and then he or she may begin to look for real solutions. For example, if a person ministering in a poor community has children, one can be sure that person will do whatever possible to ensure that the children of the community get a good education. Relocation transforms “you, them, and theirs” to “we, us, and ours.” Effective

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30 Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KN.: Faith and Life Press, 1987), 18, 22.

31 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 154.

32 Stanley Hauerwas, “Beyond the Boundaries: The Church Is Mission,” ed. Andreas Østerlund Nielsen, in *Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Mission Engaging Plurality*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 57.

33 As described on their website, [www.ccda.org](http://www.ccda.org), “the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) is a [national] network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities wholistically restored. [They] believe that God wants to restore us not only to right relationship with Himself but also with our own true selves, our families and our communities. Not just spiritually, but emotionally, physically, economically, and socially. Not by offering mercy alone, but by undergirding mercy with justice.” For more info visit [www.ccda.org/about](http://www.ccda.org/about).

ministries plant and build communities of believers that have a personal stake in the development of their neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

Engaging in the community in a way that fosters *shalom* is what the CCDA believes is an integral part of living out the gospel. “Living out the gospel,” it explains, “means desiring for one’s neighbor and neighbor’s family that which one desires for one’s self and family. Living out the gospel means bettering the quality of other people’s lives spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally as one betters one’s own... .”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in seeking the *shalom* of the city, the Church will find *shalom*.

### ***Shalom Requires a Holistic Approach that Reaches into Every Aspect of Society***

Every aspect of society has been corrupted with the effects of the fall and, as a result, churches must engage in every area of a society’s life to bring true *shalom* to their communities. This means the Church must be aware of and involved in areas such as politics, schools, businesses, and the criminal justice system. This truth is supported in Isaiah 65:17-25, which captures well the concept of *shalom* as manifest in the new Heaven and new Earth. Isaiah’s description reflects not only an internal peace, but a right order within the greater social, economic, and political structures.<sup>36</sup> In his book, *Building a People of Power*, accomplished social activist Robert Linthicum explains that, in practice, Isaiah’s description of ushering in *shalom* would include the following:

- “Decent, safe, sanitary, secure, and affordable housing for everyone (5:21-22).”
- “Jobs that provide the adequate income and bring meaning and focus to people’s lives (65:21-22).”
- “Health care that adequately provides for all people, contributes to longevity, and ends infant mortality (65:20).”
- “Neighbors that are stable, safe, and mutually supportive (65:25).”
- “Environments that are healthy and are not dangerous to people’s health and safety (65:20).”
- “Wealth relatively and equitably distributed, so that there are no great disparities in income, wealth, position or status between people (65:21-23).”
- “People living in peace with one another (65:19, 25).”<sup>37</sup>

This holistic approach is affirmed by ethics professor Jack Stotts in his description of the Christian’s task of peace making:

...Within a nation such as the United States, the task of peacemaking requires the rooting out of racism within institutions, the empowering of persons through more adequate and humane educational systems, the provision of economic resources for all, the delivery of health care for those requiring it, the opening up of political systems to provide for more accountability, and the nurturing of persons through new patterns of caring. The search for a peaceable city directs attention to human needs wherever it may be found and whatever its form, whether it be the result of conscious or unconscious activity, the consequence of an omission of concern or of a commission of exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

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34 “Relocation: Living Among the People,” Relocation - Christian Community Development Association, accessed November 07, 2013, <http://www.cdda.org/about/ccd-philosophy/relocation>.

35 Ibid.

36 Robert C. Linthicum, *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2006), 22-25.

37 Ibid.

38 Jack L. Stotts, *Shalom: The Search for a Peaceable City* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), 202.

### *Prayer Can Usher Shalom into a Community*

This radical transformation cannot happen without prayer. No matter the size of the obstacle, the pages of Scripture, annals of history, and experiences of contemporary Christians attest to the power of prayer. The Church today must go before the Lord and intercede for their communities. It is this command, though often undervalued, that is key to seeing holistic salvation in our midst. As Jack Hayford wrote, “prayer is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth.”<sup>39</sup> As the prayers of God’s people contributed to the *shalom* of their foreign city and, ultimately, their return to the Promised Land, so must churches today pray that God’s will be done and his kingdom come in their communities.

### *Practical Suggestions for the Living out of Shalom*

The question remains: “How does the Church today, often limited in resources, extend itself to have a holistic, counter-cultural impact that ushers in *shalom*?” Having interviewed sixteen city officials, public servants, and community leaders in Cambridge, MA, the author has developed four suggestions for how to foster cooperation within the Church and between churches and the Cambridge community to help bring about *shalom*.<sup>40</sup>

- Increase awareness of church resources and limitations by building a database of the demographics, ethos, assets, and needs of each church within the city.<sup>41</sup>
- Appoint and empower a committee of practitioners that fosters communication between the church and city in each practitioner’s area of expertise.
- Establish neighborhood leadership groups committed to developing relationships and reflecting unto action.
- Mobilize and empower churches to work together to address community needs.

Other ways the author has discovered the church is engaged in community outreach in Cambridge include the following:

- Community conversations on issues of violence, race and justice.
- Church-organized community sport camps
- Prayer meetings in which city officials are allowed to present, directing prayer needs.
- Collaborative after-school programs
- Food pantries and soup kitchens
- Lightly-used clothing exchanges
- Workshops on entrepreneurship and bringing one’s faith into the marketplace
- Christmas outreaches to the homeless
- Youth-led community mapping
- Back-to-school block parties that foster neighborhood connections and distribute school supplies
- Multi-cultural gatherings that celebrate diversity
- Cross-cultural church visits and conversations
- Youth mentoring programs
- Sunday-morning forums on topics like relationships, finances, and the criminal justice system, raising awareness of these areas and demonstrating how they matter in the living out of an abundant Christian life.

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<sup>39</sup> Jack W. Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977), 110, accessed July 2014, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=t76IxyYEOIC&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA111.w.1.1.0>.

<sup>40</sup> Megan Lietz, *Cambridge City-Wide Church Collaborative Cooperates to Meet Community Needs*, report (Boston: Emmanuel Research Review, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Note that this database could be constructed by expanding the Emmanuel Gospel Center’s Church Directory (<http://www.egc.org/churches/>).



These suggestions are based upon the insights and best practices of practitioners in Cambridge, MA and utilize resources that are already functioning in the city. People who seek to apply these ideas should consider their context and how what is already taking place can be harnessed to improve their community. Application takes reflection, planning, vision-casting, and the development of leaders who can cooperatively work into *shalom*. Though the obstacles are great, the fruit is sweet, as, like the Judean exiles, the church is both an agent *and* recipient of *shalom*.

### Conclusion

God's people have been chosen by the Lord to work towards the restoration of creation and usher holistic salvation into their communities. The Judeans failed to uphold this call when they conformed to the nations around them instead of transforming them into the likeness of God. As a result, the Lord sent them into exile so they could learn to walk in obedience and continue his work of restoration. While there, God commanded the exiles to settle into their community, seek the peace of the city, and pray on its behalf. Through this process, God reformed his people and equipped them to be agents of *shalom* in both the present and future generations. The Church today must continue this legacy. As the Lord commanded the Judeans, so are we to engage holistically, work towards *shalom*, and pray that God's will be done in our communities. Though a daunting task, there is hope found in Ephesians 2:14-16:

For [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (NIV)

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus, humanity was not only reconciled to God, but one another. As a result - though not yet fully actualized - *shalom* can be experienced by a broken and fallen world. With this in mind, churches today must actively pursue the crucial task of ushering *shalom* into their communities. This is the work of Christ and the call to those who desire to follow him faithfully.

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## REACHING FOR THE NEW JERUSALEM

### A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City

Edited by

SEONG HYUN PARK

AÍDA BESANÇON SPENCER

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

The task of this book is to examine the biblical and theological meaning of the city and our mission within it. It starts with the premise that the garden is lost, and we are headed toward the New Jerusalem, the city of God. In the meanwhile, we dwell in earthly cities that need to be adjusted to God's city: "[T]he fall has conditioned us to fear the city . . . though, historically, God intended it to provide safety, even refuge. . . . We have to band together and act to take back our communities if we are to help God in the divine task of reconciling the world to Godself by assisting God in adjusting our communities to God's New Jerusalem, rebuilding our own cities of Enoch on the blueprints of Christ . . . to go into all the world and share his good news, building the Christian community along the lines of the New Jerusalem, a city of light in which God is revealed." (from the Introduction by William David Spencer)

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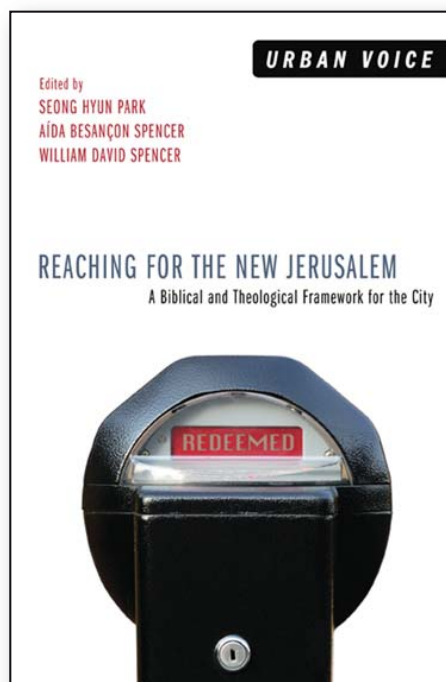
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# *The Theologia Germanica's Influence on Martin Luther's Reform*<sup>1</sup>

McCALL M. DUBBELMAN

That Martin Luther was a complex character is especially evident in his relation to mysticism. According to Gerhard O. Forde, “Luther seems to have much in common with the mystics. He praises some of them—notably John Tauler—and his own faith language is liberally sprinkled with terminology borrowed from the mystics...Yet Luther has sharp words for most mystics and rejects what many of them hold most dear.”<sup>2</sup> Although Luther did not disregard all mystical writings, there was one work of which he was especially fond, the anonymous writing of *The Theologia Germanica* (also known as *Theologia Deutsch*), which he discovered and published early on in his career. In his preface to *The Theologia Germanica*, Martin Luther wrote, “Next to the Bible and Saint Augustine no other book has come to my attention from which I have learned—and desired to learn—more concerning God, Christ, man, and what all things are.”<sup>3</sup> Even though Luther does not directly quote from *The Theologia Germanica* in his subsequent writings, the impact of the work is apparent enough. In order to offer an introduction to this important treatise and its role upon Martin Luther, the present article first will cover a brief history of the treatise and then explicate three major themes of the work and explore their relation to Luther: first, the concept of how becoming like God is not a human effort; second, the importance of dying to self; and third, the centrality of the cross.

## Historical Background

A fragmented version of *The Theologia Germanica* came into Martin Luther's hands in the year of 1516. Two years later, Luther came across a more extensive copy, which he then published in 1518.<sup>4</sup> Bengt Hoffman believes that the author purposely left out his name for reasons of survival, for the work seems to be written around a specific historical situation,<sup>5</sup> in the time period of the mid-1300's, when major struggles were emerging between the Pope and the worldly authorities.<sup>6</sup> The conflict between the leaders of the Church and the State authorities created, among other problems, a laxity in the area of Christian education or spirituality within the Body of Christ. Ordinary people were left without spiritual shepherds, and, in a sense, they were forced to look outside of the Church for help in dealing with their spiritual growth. Hoffman sums up the scene well:

In the midst of the turmoil of the late Middle Ages and as a reaction against it, a quiet revival of the spiritual life took place. The “practice of the presence of God” led many to the discovery that God is indeed not far from any of us. In order to cope with the vicissitudes of life man may, in quiet contemplation, draw strength and love from a higher world. Eternal life, engendering inner peace, is here and now. This was the spiritual rediscovery of thousands.<sup>7</sup>

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1 This article was first written as a research paper at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in a class on Martin Luther by Dr. Gordon Isaac, Fall Semester of 2013.

2 Gerhard O. Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 57.

3 Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. Bengt Hoffman (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 54.

4 Ibid., xv.

5 Ibid., 1-2.

6 Ibid., 2.

7 Ibid., 6.

Thus, new groups of devoted Christians were springing up all over Europe without the affirmation of the Roman Catholic Church.

One group in particular that rose up during this time referred to itself as “The Friends of God,” and began teaching on the “renunciation of the self, the ongoing revelation of God through the work of the Holy Spirit in man, and the ultimate union between God and man.”<sup>8</sup> Scholars believe that most of the leaders who were a part of “The Friends of God” were Dominican monks and of the Teutonic Order and within this group of people the author of *The Theologia Germanica* is typically located.<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther at first understood that *The Theologia Germanica* was written by a student from the school of mystics led by John Tauler (1300-1361), who was a part of the “Friends of God” movement and someone with whom Luther was already familiar.<sup>10</sup> Luther believed that *The Theologia Germanica* was the essence of John Tauler’s sermons.<sup>11</sup> One form of evidence that links the “Friends of God” with the author of *The Theologia Germanica* is the book’s similar thoughts against a certain contemporaneous spiritual group referred to as “The Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit.” Hoffman thinks that the “*Theologia Germanica* was in large part written to counteract the influence of the so-called Free Spirits,”<sup>12</sup> for they were a group that was trying to liberate themselves from the Church, which was not the purpose of the “Friends of God.” To Hoffman, at its heart, “The Friends of God believed that, before God, laity and clergy are on equal footing. For the sake of Christian discipline the organization of the church was considered essential.”<sup>13</sup> The “Friends” did not desire to break away from the Roman Catholic Church, instead they wanted to bring reform in order for the Church to be a place where people could grow spiritually. Unfortunately, *The Theologia Germanica* was not received well by the Catholic Church during this time and eventually was banned from publication in 1612.<sup>14</sup>

Luther advises in his preface to *The Theologia Germanica*, “Read this booklet, anyone, and determine for yourself whether the theology as we do it in Wittenberg is newfangled or in a solid tradition. This book is certainly not new.”<sup>15</sup> In Luther’s defense, he did not perceive that he was the first to want reform within the Church. Therefore, Luther saw himself continuing a prior tradition. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *The Christian Tradition*, says something similar about Luther,

The two phenomena of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries described in the preceding chapters—the pluralism of late medieval doctrine and the demand for the reformation of the church—came together in the life and teaching of Martin Luther and in the Reformation...It had not been his “will or intention” to elevate his own private theological concerns to the status of doctrinal issues affecting the entire church, and he long professed the conviction that what he had “discovered” was something that the best theologians of the church must have known all along.<sup>16</sup>

Luther came on the scene at the right moment, in step with theologians and others who came before him, paving the way for change to take place within the institutionalized Church. Luther gives us a taste of his humor and even his perspective of the Roman theologians by writing boldly at the end of his preface to *The Theologia Germanica*, “God grant that this little book may become

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8 Ibid., 7.

9 Ibid., 3, 7.

10 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: The American Edition of The Career of the Reformer 1, Volume 31*, eds. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 73.

11 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: The American Edition of Letters I, Volume 48.*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 36n.

12 Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica*, 7.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 13.

15 Ibid., 54.

16 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma 1300-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 127.

increasingly known. It will then be confirmed that the German theologians are no doubt the best theologians.”<sup>17</sup> What was it about *The Theologia Germanica* that it could elicit such praise from Luther? Exploring their similarities on the topic of growing in Christlikeness will give us an inkling.

### Becoming Like God: Not a Human Effort

The language used in the beginning of *The Theologia Germanica* sounds very mystical at first, but it quickly becomes apparent that there are certain distinctions between the writer’s intent and other forms of mysticism. During the early Middle Ages, a collection of mystical writings disseminated under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite had a major influence upon the mystics of the Medieval time period.<sup>18</sup> Dionysius’s theology tended to focus on the negative things of God: how God is unknowable, how language is not adequate in describing who God essentially is, and that it was through negating one’s affirmations about God and self that one was to arrive properly at union with God.<sup>19</sup> In *The Theologia Germanica*, the author illustrates the relationship between the creature and the Creator using similar “negative” language, “But the Creator, the Perfect, cannot be comprehended, known, and described in the same manner by creatures, on account of their creatureliness.”<sup>20</sup> The author even refers to three stages of mystical union that was a common practice amongst Christian mystics, “By the same token no one can become united with God if he has not before been illumined. That is what the three stages are for. First comes the purification, second the illumination, and third the union.”<sup>21</sup> At first glance, unity with God seems to be solely based on human effort, but, immediately following this passage, the author points to Christ and how it is through Christ’s works that humanity is redeemed. Again, the author writes, “Man could not do it without God and God has not designed to do it without man. Hence God assumed human nature or humanity. He became humanized and man became divinized. That is the way the amends were made.”<sup>22</sup> The emphasis is placed on the work of God, not on the work of humans. The author’s definition for a divinized or sanctified person is “the person who transmits and radiates the eternal and divine Light and burns with divine love,”<sup>23</sup> pointing here to the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Bengt Hoffman, *The Theologia Germanica* is “no flight from existence—as popular notions of the mystical life in God will have it. It is rather a guide to true rest in God for the sake of true moral responsibility in the affairs of men.”<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on the works of God over the works of humans would have been very different from the popular mysticism of the time which was more focused on the believer’s dedication through the mortification of the flesh, fasting, indulgences, alms giving, etc. Thus, the teaching spread that followers of Christ could be perfected through their own works, imitating the life of Christ, instead of resting solely in the completed work of Jesus on the cross.

Jaroslav Pelikan, referring to the impact that *The Theologia Germanica* had upon Luther, writes, “In the opinion of many historians, it was at least in part from this source that Luther drew his stress upon the passivity of the soul in its reception of grace, which was in turn part of the presupposition for his doctrine of justification by faith.”<sup>25</sup> Possibly, it could be argued that this anonymous work largely impacted in creating or confirming nascent thoughts regarding the difference between the works of humans and the works of God. One of Luther’s greatest

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17 Martin Luther, *Theologia Germanica*, 54.

18 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.

19 Gerhard O. Forde, *The Preached Word: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, eds. Mark C. Mattes and Seven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 62.

20 Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica*, 60.

21 Ibid., 75.

22 Ibid., 63.

23 Ibid., 120.

24 Ibid., xvi.

25 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 174.



disagreements with the Catholic Church consisted of its insistence on human merit, which in his opinion contradicted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the time Luther wrote his doctrine on justification by faith alone in his *Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses* (1518), he had already read and published the full version of *The Theologia Germanica*, giving proof to its influence on his theology.<sup>26</sup> In Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, he begins by saying, "The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him. Much less can human works, which are done over and over again with the aid of natural precepts, so to speak, lead to that end."<sup>27</sup> It seems as if the German mystics and their writings helped pave the way for Luther to realize the importance of passive righteousness. God justifies the ungodly by faith and not by works. Harold J. Grimm, one of the editors and translators of *Luther's Works*, observes, "During his formative years Luther was much impressed by the writings of the late-medieval German mystics, particularly by their emphasis upon the necessity of a spiritual rebirth of despair before one could be united with God...Moreover, he had discarded all references to man's own merits in obtaining salvation."<sup>28</sup> Also, according to Robert Kolb, "Tauler taught him (Luther) to throw himself completely and exclusively on the mercy of God. This focal point began moving Luther's religious awareness from inside himself to outside himself."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Lutheran justification would become based on the external promise of the Gospel in Word and sacrament and not upon an internal subjective stirring which would ultimately lead once again to a works righteousness. The key difference is *The Theologia Germanica's* views on the importance of dying to self in order to live for Christ and the impact of this perspective on Luther.

### Death to Self

Not simply once, but repeatedly, the author of *The Theologia Germanica* recognizes the need for a Christian to die to self, explaining, "For in whichever creature this perfect life is to be known, creatureliness, createdness, selfishness, must be abandoned and destroyed."<sup>30</sup> This view is at the heart and core of the author's theology. The author narrows in on the fall of Adam in order to point out how Satan's tactic in tempting Adam was to focus him on the self instead of on God, pointing out that Adam's sin was "because of his presumption and because of his I and his Mine, his Me and the like."<sup>31</sup> Once Adam's thinking became consumed with solely himself, it easily led him to sin and disobedience. The author explains how this process of becoming self-focused gives birth to the illusion that humanity is good, but, "That I ascribe some good to myself stems from the illusion that the Good is mine or that I am It. If I had inner knowledge I would indeed know that I am not the Good, that It is not mine, that It does not emanate from me, and so forth."<sup>32</sup> He counteracts this error by stating that the Lord alone is good. This line of thought is seen in Luther's writing, especially in *The Heidelberg Disputation*, for the main theme throughout the work is focused on the goodness of God in contrast to the sinfulness of humans. Luther writes, "it is to this that Christ says in John 3 [:7], 'You must be born anew.' To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man. To die, I say, means to feel death at hand."<sup>33</sup> The author of *The Theologia Germanica* understood this as well, for he wrote, "Man must put aside all 'selfdom' and concern with the 'Self' so that he does not look out for himself at all, indeed as though he did not exist."<sup>34</sup> This is to be a daily action, a daily dying to the sinfulness of one's self and to be focused instead on God. Again, he points out what a life surrendered to Christ looks like,

26 Martin Luther, *Luther's Work: The American Edition of The Career of the Reformer 1, Volume 31*, 79.

27 Ibid., 39.

28 Ibid., 73.

29 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, 29.

30 Martin Luther, *Theologia Germanica*, 61.

31 Ibid., 62.

32 Ibid., 65.

33 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: The American Edition of The Career of the Reformer 1, Volume 31*, 55.

34 Martin Luther, *Theologia Germanica*, 76.

“for in the true life of Christ, the self and the I and the natural life are surrendered, lost and given up for dead.”<sup>35</sup> He emphasizes this point even more when writing, “This stems from the fact that people are more like the devil than like God. The concerns of the I and the self are the devil’s field. That is why he is a devil.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, we can see the immediate need to die to self, to die to the part of ourselves that is most like Satan and not like God in order to be living in Him. And even this step is impossible without the help of God, for “when a person surrenders and abandons his own self, God enters with His own, that is His self.”<sup>37</sup> This sounds akin to Luther’s words, when he writes, “Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his works, for the works which he does are the fulfillment of the commands of God given us through faith. If we look at them we are moved to imitate them.”<sup>38</sup> Luther also stresses the importance of daily dying and rising in Christ in his instructions on baptism in the *Small Catechism*, “The old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC 4.5).<sup>39</sup> Both authors are pointing to the important role, the main role that God plays in the lives of Christians, for they cannot accomplish anything without the power of God, especially in the area of dying to self. This is a personal work that takes place between God and the believer. The author of *The Theologia Germanica* comments on this by urging,

Let no one believe that he can come to this true Light and this inner knowledge or to the Christ life with the aid of much questioning or secondhand information or by way of reading and studying, or with high skills and academic mastery, or with high natural reasoning...He who does not let go of and relinquish the things of the world can never truly know or come into My life.<sup>40</sup>

The ability to die to self can only be experienced personally within the context of relationship with Jesus Christ, giving space and room for His Holy Spirit to work within the believer. Again, Luther notes in the *Small Catechism* “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith” (SC 2.3).<sup>41</sup> A similar convergence can also be seen in the theology of the cross of Christ within *The Theologia Germanica* and Luther.

### Theology of the Cross

The cross of Christ ties together the importance of not relying on human merit and the concept of dying to self. Luther states in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, “For this reason true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ, as it is stated in John 10 [John 14: 6]: ‘No one comes to the Father, but by me.’”<sup>42</sup> The author of *The Theologia Germanica* wrote something similar to Luther when advising, “Furthermore, if you wish to follow Him you must take the cross upon you. The cross is the same as the Christ life and that is a bitter cross for natural man. Christ says about the cross: He who does not leave all and does not take the cross upon himself is not worthy of Me and is not My disciple and follows Me not.”<sup>43</sup> The cross is at the center of the “German Theology,” for it is the work accomplished on the cross that gives way for each Christian to die to self. Luther

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35 Ibid., 84.

36 Ibid., 86.

37 Ibid., 90.

38 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: The American Edition of The Career of the Reformer 1, Volume 31*, 56-57.

39 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 360.

40 Martin Luther, *Theologia Germanica*, 83.

41 Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 355.

42 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: The American Edition of The Career of the Reformer 1, Volume 31*, 53.

43 Martin Luther, *Theologia Germanica*, 143.

quotes Tauler in explaining God's desire to crucify the old Adam:

There is a saying of Tauler's—although he does not speak in terms of Holy Scripture but employs a strange and foreign way of speaking—"Man should know that he has done great damage if he does not wait for God's work," namely, when God wants to crucify him, mortify him, and reduce the old man to nothing. This does not come about except through suffering and the cross; for then you are upholding the work of God, who forms you, planes you, and cuts off the rough branches. With ax, saw, and mattock He cuts down everything that hinders the eternal building, as David says: "Be still before God, and be formed for him" (cf. Ps. 37:7).<sup>44</sup>

The Christian life is to be rooted in the crucified Christ, in the gift of salvation, not because of human works, but because of the gift of God in giving His Son to die in humankind's stead. Luther beautifully sums up the reason for the cross in the Christian life, when he counsels, "Therefore, we should always pay attention to the promises in relation to our suffering, namely, that our cross and affliction will turn out for the best in a way that we could not wish or imagine."<sup>45</sup> For Christ did not stay on the cross forever but was resurrected from the dead, thus providing the power of his Holy Spirit. Christ's cross brought freedom to this world from the evil one, and it is through the power of the cross that Christians have new life. According to Robert Kolb, "Luther accentuated the power of the gospel (the cross) to re-create sinners in God's image."<sup>46</sup> For Luther, the cross brought comfort in the midst of a painful and difficult world. In Robert Kolb's words,

Suffering marks the Christian life, and the fact that it often seems to be undeserved and contrary to God's promises raises doubts in Christian minds. Luther's "theology of the cross" called believers to patience in suffering and to peace with their sufferings in view of the fact that God accomplishes his purposes through both his own suffering on the cross and his people's in the midst of battling evil.<sup>47</sup>

This realization brought consolation to Luther when thinking about suffering in this life and a deeper understanding of the importance of following Christ, even in the midst of pain. The author of *The Theologia Germanica* writes also in a similar vein concerning bearing the cross of Christ for the reward is coming to know the Father, "In this way you would also come with and through Christ to the Father. You would be a true servant of Christ...He who follows Christ by serving Him thus arrives at the place where Christ dwells, that is, the Father...Lo, the person who walks this way walks through the door into the sheepfold that is to say into the eternal Life."<sup>48</sup> The unconditional promise rooted in the cross of Christ that is given to those who follow Jesus as Lord is the unimaginable reward of everlasting life with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### Conclusion

In this article, I have presented three points within *The Theologia Germanica* that helped shape Martin Luther's approach to mystical thought and practice: union with God cannot be obtained by human effort, the Christian's need of dying daily to the self; and the centrality of the cross of Christ; all of which played a role in affecting Luther's understanding of passive righteousness, the importance and role of baptism (dying daily to the old Adam and Eve) and how the crucified Christ is the one who transforms believers into the images of God. All three points help those who follow Jesus to find their true selves in Him. Luther's Christ-centered theology is portrayed in his

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44 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: The American Edition of The Lectures on Genesis Chapters 38-44, Volume 7*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965), 133.

45 Martin Luther, *Luther's Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, eds. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. W. Krey (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 155.

46 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, 55.

47 Ibid., 57.

48 Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica*, 143-144.

comforting words to those who face death in his treatise, *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, “Never, therefore, let this be erased from your vision. Seek yourself only in Christ and not in yourself and you will find yourself in him eternally.”<sup>49</sup> The author of *The Theologia Germanica* echoes Luther’s admonishment with his own conclusion to the German treatise, “May we abandon our selfish ways and die away from our own will and live only to God and His will. May we be helped to this by Him who surrendered His will to His Heavenly Father, and Who lives and rules with God, the Father, in union with the Holy Spirit, in perfect Trinity.”<sup>50</sup>

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49 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 42: The American Edition of The Devotional Writings, Vol.1*, eds. Martin O. Dietrich and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 106.

50 Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica*, 149.

# Dionysian Mystical Theology and Its Rejection by Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

SAMUEL J. DUBBELMAN

## Part A: Summary of the Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

In this article I offer first a summary of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (part A) and second an overview of Martin Luther's rejection of Dionysian mystical theology (part B). Although a survey of this kind may seem at first glance like a piece of obscure historical minutia, I believe that the issues raised in the confrontation of these two influential thinkers have essential implications on both the way we sort out the foundations of our theology and our approach to pastoral practice today. For instance, is the foundation of our theology and pastoral practice the church's linguistic witness to a specific set of temporal events (1 Cor. 15:1ff) and resulting promises because Jesus lives? Or, does a greater "apophatic" (negative) step need to be taken beyond the linguistic, conceptual and temporal affirmations of Scripture and the church in order to be truly united to God because God's nature is ultimately beyond all affirmation, conception, and temporality?

Dionysius the Areopagite was one of the two named converts from Paul's sermon "to an unknown" God in Athens (Acts 17:22-34). Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical Histories* (III.4), lists him as the first Bishop of Athens.<sup>2</sup> For nearly a thousand years, a collection of four books (*The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) and ten letters were falsely attributed to this convert of Paul. Today, it is generally believed that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (CD) was written some five hundred years later, sometime between 476 and 533.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, the writer of these works is now commonly referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius.

There was not a contemporary twentieth-century English translation of the Dionysian corpus until the one completed by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem in 1987 and the previous nineteenth-century translation by John Parker still considered Dionysius a first-century writer.<sup>4</sup> Despite the unavailability of the writings in the English world, they have exercised a massive influence on both Western and Eastern Christian spirituality. Eugene Peterson claims that the Dionysian corpus "has had more influence on Western spirituality than any other writing," with the exception of the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup> Even if Peterson's statement is a bit exaggerated, the import of Dionysius's influence can be traced in several key areas, including his coinage of the term "hierarchy" and the lesser known "thearchy."<sup>6</sup> His view of a celestial hierarchy was influential well into the late Middle Ages as seen, for example, in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Paradiso*, XXVIII.130-135)<sup>7</sup> and his impact on theological aesthetics is evidenced by his inclusion in the second volume of Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*. His influence on Gothic architecture can be noted at the abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris.<sup>8</sup> The title and conception of the influential and anonymous fourteenth-century work *The Cloud of Unknowing* was taken from Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* and he also had a major

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1 This article was first written as two separate papers at Gordon-Conwell: the first was a paper on Dionysius the Areopagite in Dr. Donald Fairbairn's Patristic Theology, Summer 2013; the second was a paper written on Martin Luther's Rejection of Dionysius the Areopagite in Dr. Gordon Isaac's Martin Luther, Fall 2013.

2 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 85.

3 Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 161.

4 Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

5 Eugene Peterson, *Take and Read* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

6 Bernard McGinn and Patricia McGinn, *Early Christian Mystics* (New York: CrossRoad, 2003), 175-76.

7 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy III: Paradise*, trs. Dorothy Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 304-5.

8 Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*, 3.



influence on the formulation of apophatic, or negative, theology which would blossom into the Medieval *via negativa*.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Four Keys to Dionysian Mystical Theology*

Andrew Louth and Balthasar both treat mystical theology as the crowning piece of Dionysius's writing.<sup>10</sup> Four keys to Dionysian mystical theology (affirmation, negation, celebration and desire) are displayed well in Dionysius's description of his alleged teacher and exemplar of the spiritual life, Hierotheus. He recalls that his "famous teacher" wrote in *Elements of Theology* "whatever he learned directly from the sacred writers . . . whatever his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him . . . [and] whatever was made known to him through that more mysterious inspiration, not only learning but also experiencing the divine things."<sup>11</sup> Dionysius also relates a mystical and ecstatic encounter his teacher had while allegedly worshipping with the apostles James and Peter. While gathered to "praise the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty" Hierotheus surpassed all the others and "was so caught up, so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him . . . considered him to be inspired, to be speaking with divine praises."<sup>12</sup>

Dionysius's description of his teacher offers several keys to understanding his mystical theology. First, mystical theology is contemplation of God through the affirmations of what can be seen and perceived, especially in Scripture; second, it is an even "more mysterious inspiration" of experiencing and being united with the Divine through an apophatic movement beyond affirmation. Third, mystical theology is the contemplation of and union with this unknown God through celebration and praise which transcends all assertion and denial. And fourth, all of this – the affirmation, the negation, the praising – is fueled by a responsive yearning (*eros*) for the ecstatic love of God. To force the four points into one sentence and in a different order, Dionysian mystical theology is the yearning contemplative life of returning to the God of love through a hymnic celebration of affirmation (we know God in what we see) and negation (God is ultimately beyond what we see).

#### *The Peak of Affirmations*

In the third chapter of *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysius poses the question "What are the affirmative [cataphatic] theologies and what are the negative [apophatic]?"<sup>13</sup> Dionysian Mystical theology begins with what can be affirmed through the senses and the intellect. Although this is the case, I suggest that even Dionysius's affirmations are inherently apophatic (the way of denial), because cataphatic theology (the way of affirmation) ultimately only takes one to the precipice of contemplation and requires a further, deeper, apophatic plunge into the unknown.

The first example of Dionysius's use of cataphatic theology is his emphasis on Scripture. At the beginning of *The Divine Names*, Dionysius instructs Timothy, to whom all the books are addressed, that all cataphatic theology must be based on the affirmations of Scripture, "We must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed."<sup>14</sup> Yet, the affirmations of Scripture only allow one to look so far, and a greater, apophatic, step needs to be taken in order to experience

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9 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 6. Dionysius's impact on Eastern apophasis is evidenced in Vladimir Lossky's essay "Apophasis and Trinitarian Theology" in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. by Daniel Clendenin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker and Paternoster, 2003), 149-62.

10 Louth, 160 & Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, v. II of the *Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, Brian McNeil and ed. by John Riches (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1984), 204.

11 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist, 1987), 65.

12 *Ibid.*, 70.

13 *Ibid.*, 138.

14 *Ibid.*, 49.

true union with the God beyond all cognition. For, the Scriptures themselves teach us that God is beyond affirmation, he is “not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also unsearchable and inscrutable.”<sup>15</sup> Since God is beyond comprehension and direct contemplation, “mind beyond mind, word beyond speech,” God alone can give an authoritative account of what he really is.<sup>16</sup> God, in his goodness, has communicated something to humankind in which they may contemplate what is permitted, the sensible world around them and the sensible images in Scripture, and in that contemplation, to participate in God and consequently arrive at a state of becoming like him.<sup>17</sup> Dionysius was writing, after all, for “those devoted to the understanding of scripture.”<sup>18</sup>

Dionysius’s approach to Scripture may be summarized as doxological, symbolical, and Neo-Platonic. First, he treated all Scripture as a hymn to or celebration of the invisible God, “With our minds made prudent and holy, we offer worship to that which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being. With wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible.”<sup>19</sup> In several places, he mentions singing the Scriptures.<sup>20</sup> Second, he interpreted Scripture symbolically, as explicated in letter nine to Titus who asked “what is the house of wisdom, what is the mixing bowl, and what are its foods and drinks.”<sup>21</sup> Before discussing these specific images found in Proverbs 9:1-5, the author discusses his symbolical interpretive method which seems to be a summary of the purported treatise *The Symbolic Theology*. Scripture speaks of God and the celestial beings through perceptible symbols so that “multiple shapes and forms [may] be given to what has neither shape nor form.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, while reading Scripture one must discern “a correlation between visible signs and invisible reality,”<sup>23</sup> for, when one reads the symbols of Scripture they are dealing with “dissimilar similarities” to the heavenly realities.<sup>24</sup> For instance, the bowl, which is among the above quoted images from Proverbs nine, some of which are only evident in the version of the Septuagint Dionysius was reading, “being round and uncovered, has to be a symbol of the Providence which has neither a beginning nor an end, which is open to all and encompasses all. Proceeding outward to everything, it yet remains in itself and continues to be its unaltered self.”<sup>25</sup> Third, Dionysius interprets Scripture through a platonic schema of procession and return, that is, he starts with unity (God), descends to multiplicity (us and knowing through the senses), only to rise to unity again: “we must come down to the plains of distinction and multiplicity, to the many variegated forms and shapes adopted by the angels. Then, once more, we will take off from these images, and will, by retracing, rise up again to the simplicity of the heavenly minds.”<sup>26</sup> Exegesis, therefore, should follow a pattern which in turn mirrors the action of God descending in revelation and lifting the interpreter to the heights of purification, illumination, and perfection.

Dionysius follows the same apophatic tendencies when thinking about the Trinity and the Incarnation. The unions of God are incomprehensible to humans, for we can only know things through distinctions. The true essence of the Trinity is, therefore, essentially hidden and, thus, humanity can only contemplate it through appropriate symbols and analogies. The same is true with his view of the incarnation: “The most evident idea in theology, namely, the sacred incarnation of Jesus for our sakes, is something which cannot be enclosed in words nor grasped by any mind, not even by the leaders among the front ranks of the angels. That he undertook to be a man is, for

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15 *Ibid.*, 50.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 175.

19 *Ibid.*, 50.

20 *Ibid.*, 227.

21 *Ibid.*, 280.

22 *Ibid.*, 283.

23 *Ibid.*, 187.

24 *Ibid.*, 189.

25 *Ibid.*, 285-6.

26 *Ibid.*, 182.

us, entirely mysterious.”<sup>27</sup>

One of the most well known and most controverted passages of the *CD* regards the incarnation,

He was neither human nor nonhuman; although humanly born he was far superior to man, and being above men he yet truly did become man. Furthermore, it was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being a man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst – the activity of the God-man.<sup>28</sup>

In some versions, the phrase “something new in our midst, the activity of the God-man” [*kainen tina ten theandriken energeian*] has been transmitted “a single activity of the God-man” [*mian theandriken energeian*].<sup>29</sup> This may make Dionysius a proponent of “Monenergism,” the theory that there was a single operation [*energeia*] in the incarnate Logos. That is at least how Cyrus of Alexandria (d. 642) read it, “one and the same Christ does the acts that befit God and the human acts by single divine-human action, according to Dionysius one of the Saints.”<sup>30</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan asks a crucial question: how did the controversy over “one operation [*energeia*]” or “two operations [*energeiai*]” and “one will” or “two wills” topple Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople and Pope Honorius I, but leave Dionysius unscathed?<sup>31</sup> Pelikan surmises that Dionysius escaped condemnation because the pseudonym actually worked and because of the efforts of Maximus the Confessor to bring Dionysian mysticism into the orthodox Nicene-Chalcedonian faith.<sup>32</sup>

Even though Dionysius states that theology must be thoroughly grounded in the affirmations of God’s revelation, at times his affirmations only seem to serve as a prop for the greater task of apophatic theology. Louth, commenting on Dionysius’s affirmation of the Trinity, states that “if this is cataphatic theology, in that it affirms something about God, it is clearly no less apophatic, in that our affirmations are taking us beyond what we can grasp.”<sup>33</sup>

### *Beyond the Summit*

The basic logic of Dionysian mystical theology is that first, through affirmative theology, one moves from perceptible symbols to contemplate the conceptions they symbolize, and, then, through apophatic theology, one moves beyond every conception, and, it seems, even speech and knowledge itself, to union and participation with the God who is beyond all knowing.

Dionysius begins *The Mystical Theology* instructing Timothy to leave behind “everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> Just as oxygen gives way at high altitude, so do words and the ideas that they signify: “the more it [our collected affirmations and words] climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indiscernible.”<sup>35</sup>

Similar to Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius uses the example of Moses’s ascent of Sinai to meet with the invisible God as a metaphor of the soul’s ascent in contemplation. First, Moses submits

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27 *Ibid.*, 65.

28 *Ibid.*, 265.

29 Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality” in *The Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 20.

30 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine v. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 65.

31 Pelikan, “The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality,” 21.

32 Pelikan, “The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality,” 23.

33 Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 166.

34 *The Complete Works*, 135.

35 *Ibid.*, 139.

to purification and “pushes ahead to the summit of divine ascents.”<sup>36</sup> But on the summit, Moses “does not meet God himself,” rather “he contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells.”<sup>37</sup> What Moses sees and hears and perceives is the means through which God manifests himself and conveys his “unimaginable presence.” Moses breaks free from what is seen and “plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing” and through unknowing is united completely to the Unknown.<sup>38</sup>

Even though Dionysius favors the negative method, affirmations cannot be done away with. Mystical theology is a dance of light and dark, of affirmation and negation; it is paradoxical at its core and therefore hard to systematize neatly. Resultantly, God is spoken of in a dialectical way of negating one’s affirmations: “he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is;”<sup>39</sup> “every attribute may be predicated of him and yet he is not any one thing. He is every shape and structure, and yet is formless and beautyless;”<sup>40</sup> “he is known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, imagination, name, and many other things. On the other hand he cannot be understood, words cannot contain him, and no name can lay hold of him.”<sup>41</sup> God is spoken of best with a constant yes and a constant no, with the no winning the wrestling match at the end of the day.

Although, according to Vladimir Lossky, Dionysian apophatic mystical theology is not merely conceptually positing a negative statement to a positive statement, it is a metaphorical way of speaking of the experiential union with God that can only be described as darkness or unknowing. Negative theology, therefore, is not an end in itself but rather “a way towards mystical union with God, whose nature remains incomprehensible to us.”<sup>42</sup> Incomprehensibility is the one “definition” proper to God.<sup>43</sup> Lossky posits that here Dionysius separates himself from neoplatonic philosophy. Though Neoplatonic philosophy, as Dionysius, speaks of an ecstatic divine union, the divine is still an object, which can be defined, the “One.” Lossky states, “This ecstatic union will be a reduction to simplicity rather than a going forth from the realm of created beings, as in Dionysius.”<sup>44</sup> Dionysian *ecstasis* is a step beyond affirmation and negation, because it is a step beyond any kind of reasoning.<sup>45</sup> Apophasis is not the communion itself, but rather the only conceptual way to describe a union with God that is beyond conception.

### *Celebration at the Summit*

Dionysius’s apophaticism leads him to praise the God beyond his understanding. Before discussing the name of God as “Being” in *The Divine Names*, Dionysius states that his purpose is not to reveal Being in its transcendence, which is something wholly unrevealed and unknown, but rather “to sing a hymn of praise” (*hymnein*).<sup>46</sup> Balthasar comments that, for Dionysius, “where it is a matter of God and the divine, the word *hymnein* almost replaces the word ‘to say.’” The word, he comments, and its derivatives occur 108 times.<sup>47</sup> Louth states that the first thing to notice in Dionysius’s theology is that in it “we learn how to *celebrate* (*hymnein*).” For, it is “not about how

36 *Ibid.*, 137.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*, 56.

40 *Ibid.*, 101.

41 *Ibid.*, 109.

42 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 28.

43 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 31.

44 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 32.

45 Rowan Williams, “Lossky, the *via negative* and the foundations of theology” in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. by Mike Higon (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 3.

46 *The Complete Works*, 96.

47 Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* vol. II, 173.

we can predicate qualities of God, but about how we can praise him.” His theology is not primarily concerned with academics, but “with the creature’s response of praise and worship to the Love of God.”<sup>48</sup> Further, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is, according to Louth, the first example of the Byzantine way of doing theology as a commentary on the liturgy.<sup>49</sup> What is more, Pope Benedict XVI, in a catechetical lection on Dionysius, states that “God cannot be spoken of in an abstract way; to speak of God is always – he uses the Greek word – a *hymnein*.”<sup>50</sup> Dionysius understood that the proper task of theological reflection (whether apophatic or cataphatic or something beyond them both) was the praise of God, that is, “the proper aim of all true theology is doxology.”<sup>51</sup>

### *Divine Yearning*

Dionysian mystical theology culminates in an ecstatic denial of the self; the lover is subsumed in the Beloved. This apophasis of the self finds its place in the *eros* of divine longing. The proper response to the manifestations of God is to desire the God behind the manifestations. For Dionysius the concepts of yearning (*eros*) and love (*agapē*) have “one and the same meaning.”<sup>52</sup> And although the word *eros* is not employed by Paul, Dionysius finds Paul as the *exemplar* of what Charles Stang refers to as “anthropological apophasis” (Gal. 2:20 and 2 Cor. 5:13). Dionysius enlists the maxim of Ignatius “He for whom I yearn has been crucified,”<sup>53</sup> as evidence of this divine yearning. Dionysian mystical theology is ecstasy in response to ecstasy, that is, an emptying of the self in response to the self-giving of God in Christ and Stang suggests that the very act of writing under a pseudonym served as an intentional exercise of this apophasis of the self.

Yearning begins with God. Humans are not able to grasp this divine yearning on their own and are left with empty images, “so it is left to the divine Wisdom to lift them and to raise them up to a knowledge of what yearning really is.”<sup>54</sup> The foundation of this mystical yearning is the initiating *eros* of God in the incarnation:

It must be said too that the very cause of the universe is the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.<sup>55</sup>

God’s desire is prior to humanity’s, his action is prior to humanity’s. The incarnation, the ecstatic procession of God towards people, is what draws humans back into union with him. For, “Divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to the self but to the beloved.”<sup>56</sup>

Charles Stang suggests that Dionysian “apophatic anthropology” is rooted in Dionysius’s understanding of Paul, the ecstatic lover of God. Dionysius highlights several passages in Paul to display this apophasis, or unknowing, of the self in being united with the Unknown God such as Galatians 2:20, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”<sup>57</sup> Stang summarizes that Dionysius “attributes this apophatic anthropology to the apostle, whom he regards as having yearned for God so zealously that he stretched himself to the point of splitting and thereby opened

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48 Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 166.

49 Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 178.

50 Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers and Teachers* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius, 2010), 28.

51 Gordon D. Fee, “Exegesis and Spirituality: Completing the Circle” in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 5.

52 *The Complete Works*, 81.

53 *Ibid.*, 81.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*, 82.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*, 81.



himself to the indwelling of Christ.”<sup>58</sup> Stang also suggests that the very act of writing under a pseudonym itself was an apophatic act of unknowing. Since Christ broke into the “I” of Paul, when one imitates Paul, or one of his disciples, such as Dionysius, one is imitating Christ himself.<sup>59</sup> The author of the *CD* completely takes on the role of the first century Dionysius, and yet at the same time can quote freely from the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (AD 410 or 412-485). The entire *CD* is a “mystical theology” of the unknowing of God and the self. Therefore, the very act of writing under a pseudonym was also an act of anthropological apophasis. In doing this, Dionysius is displaying what it means to make room for the ecstatic indwelling of Christ, “it is no longer I.”

### Conclusion

Dionysian mystical theology is hard to pin down. Nevertheless, in this article I have presented four key aspects: first, it is grounded in affirmations and especially Scripture; second, it is a union with the God beyond these affirmations, which incorporates an apophatic (negative) unknowing of what can be affirmed; third, one goal of mystical theology is doxology, the praise of God. All Scripture, all liturgy, all affirmation, all denial is a celebration of the God behind it all; and fourth, God in his divine *eros* comes to us from his transcendent dwelling place, so that we may respond in like desire and be united to him through an anthropological apophasis, which is a denial of the self.

### Part B: An Overview of Martin Luther’s Rejection of Dionysian Mystical Theology

One of the transitional figures in this debate was the monk/scholar turned reformer Martin Luther. Before him was the same question with which we struggle today when we wrestle with the approach to mystics like Pseudo-Dionysius, namely: where do people meet God? Or rather, where does God meet us? Should we seek God in his invisibility and transcendence, that is, his unknowability, or should we peer into the ordinarieness and finiteness of the manger and cross? Dionysius says, “Seek God in a cloud of unknowing and un-saying;” whereas Martin Luther says, “Seek God in the concrete action of the cross, the Word and the sacraments.”

Luther’s attack concentrated on four major fronts: *historically*, for he is not the alleged convert of Paul people thought him to be for nearly a thousand years; *philosophically*, because his negative theology is more Platonic than it is Christian; *soteriologically*, because he advocates union with and a knowledge of God apart from Christ and the cross; and *hermeneutically*, because Dionysius’s hermeneutic appears to be full of speculative prattle and self-made allegorization.

Luther was familiar with all five of the works found in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*). The first references appear in the *Dictata super Psalterium* of 1513-1516. On October 22, 1512 Luther was appointed to the faculty at Wittenberg as *Doctor in Biblia* and his first lectures were on the Psalms, a book he was accustomed to praying as an Augustinian monk.<sup>60</sup> Here, Luther speaks very fondly of the “blessed Dionysius” and exalts negative theology above affirmative. Commenting on the text of Psalm 18:11 he says,

*The Hiding place of God is darkness.* In the first place, because He dwells in the riddle and darkness of faith. Second, because He dwells in an unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), so that no mind can penetrate to Him, unless he has given up his own light and has been lifted higher. Therefore **blessed Dionysius teaches that one must enter into anagogical darkness and ascend by way of denials.** For thus God is hidden and beyond understanding.<sup>61</sup>

Luther states, commenting on Psalm 65:1,

<sup>58</sup> Stang, “Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym,” 18.

<sup>59</sup> Stang, “Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym,” 21.

<sup>60</sup> Hilton Oswald, “Introduction to volume 10” in *First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75*, Luther’s Works, vol. 10, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trs. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1974), ix.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75*, 119-120; emphasis mine.

“Praise is due thee” or in Hebrew “To Thee, silence, praise.” or “Let praise be silent to Thee.” This is understood, first...that praise of God is silence on our part...Second, in accordance with the **ecstatic and negative theology**, by means of which God is **praised in a way beyond expression** and by being silent because of the amazement and wonder induced by His majesty, so that now the worshipper feels that not only every word is less than His praise, but also that every thought is inferior to His praise. This is true Cabala, which is extremely rare. For as the affirmative way concerning God is imperfect, both in understanding and in speaking, so the negative way is altogether perfect. Therefore a frequent word in Dionysius is *hyper*, for beyond every thought one must simply step into the fog. **Nevertheless, I do not think that the letter of this psalm is speaking about this anagogy. Therefore our theologians are too rash when they argue and make assertions so boldly about matters divine.** For, as I have said, the affirmative theology is like milk to wine in relation to the negative theology. This cannot be treated in a disputation and with much speaking, but must be done in the supreme repose of the mind in silence, as in a rapture and ecstasy. **This is what makes a true theologian.** But no university crowns anyone like this, only the Holy Spirit. And whoever has seen this, sees how all affirmative theology knows nothing.<sup>62</sup>

Luther rightly roots Dionysian way of denial in praise. And, as we noted, all of Dionysius’s writings were meant to be a hymn to the unknown God (Acts 17:22), thus Andrew Louth rooted his apophaticism in the mystery of the rites of Church’s liturgy, not the speculation or ecstasy of the individual.<sup>63</sup> In these two early texts it could seem at first glance that the young Luther wholeheartedly supports “the blessed Dionysius.” And yet Luther’s comments on Psalm 65:1 have caused some to hesitate. Many recent scholars (Karl Heinz Muhlen, Karlfried Froechlich, and Paul Rorem) have argued that there is still much distance here between the two thinkers. Rorem suggests that even the early commentary on Psalm 18:11 is an “alternative reading” of Dionysius, substituting the Dionysian *absconditus et incomprehensibilis* for the *absconditus* of the humanity of the incarnation and the cross.<sup>64</sup> This is also supported by Bernard McGinn in his article “Vere tu es Deus absconditus: *the hidden God in Luther and some mystics*,” where he views studying Luther and Dionysius as “little more than an exercise in contrasts.”<sup>65</sup>

After the Psalms, Luther turned to the book of Romans from the spring of 1515 to the fall of 1516.<sup>66</sup> It is here that we begin to enter into the heart of Luther’s “Christocentric critique” (as Rorem puts it) of Dionysius. Luther claims that it is clear from Romans 5:2 that we cannot contemplate the uncreated Word, as the mystical theologians attempt, but rather must meet the Word in the sufferings of incarnation:

This also applies to those who follow the mystical theology and struggle in inner darkness, omitting all pictures of Christ’s suffering, wishing to hear and contemplate only the uncreated Word Himself, but not having first been justified and purged in the eyes of their heart through the incarnate Word. For the incarnate Word is first necessary for the purity of the heart, and only when one has this purity, can he through this Word be taken up spiritually into the uncreated Word. But who is there who thinks he is so pure that he dares aspire to this level unless he is called and led into the rapture by God, as was the case with the apostle Paul.<sup>67</sup>

62 Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75*, 313; emphasis mine.

63 Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 29-31.

64 Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” in *Lutheran Quarterly* XI number 3 (Autumn 1997), 295.

65 Bernard McGinn, “Vere tu es Deus absconditus: *the hidden God in Luther and some Mystics*” in *Silence and the Word*, eds. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 100.

66 Hilton Oswald, “Introduction to Volume 25” in *Lectures on Romans*, Luther’s Works, vol. 25, ed. Hilton Oswald, trs. Walter G. Tillmanns and Jacob A. O. Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), x.

67 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 287-288.

Again, as in the Psalms, Luther stresses experience, but whereas in Psalms it was the experience of the silence of praise, here it is the experience of the purgation of justification through the incarnate Word. In Romans, we also find two glosses in the list of names in Chapter 16, showing that Luther was familiar with the ten epistles of Dionysius because he links the names of Sosipater (Rom 16:21) and Gaius (16:23) with two of the recipients of Dionysius's Epistles.<sup>68</sup> If Luther has rejected Dionysian mystical theology by this point, as Rorem has argued, he has not rejected Dionysius yet on historical grounds, but still sees him as the first century convert of Paul.

The next references are found in Luther's lectures on Hebrews from April 1517 to March 1518.<sup>69</sup>

1:14 [*Are they not all ministering spirits*] *sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain the inheritance?* It is a much-discussed question whether all the angels are sent. St. Dionysius says that the higher hosts are never sent...But the text clearly says that "all are sent forth to serve"....Dionysius is speaking about the visible sending, for not all are sent in this way; but the apostle is speaking about the invisible sending, and all are sent in this way."<sup>70</sup>

And,

5:12 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's words.* Here the apostle makes a clear distinction, namely, that there are words of God for those who are perfect, for beginners, and necessarily therefore also for those who are making progress. This difference is not understood more easily than in accordance with that threefold theology also mentioned above, namely, symbolic, rational, and spiritual; or in the following way: sensual, rational, and spiritual theology. Dionysius calls the last type *alogos* that is, illogical, namely, because it can be communicated or grasped neither by word nor by reason but only by **experience**. Symbolic theology is that which teaches how to learn to know God by means of figures and perceptible images, as formerly among the Jews in the temple, the tabernacle, the ark, in sacrifice, and the like. Today, too, these things are tolerated among Christians in the images that adorn the churches, in songs, in organs, and the like."<sup>71</sup>

Luther is still interacting somewhat positively with "St. Dionysius." Again, Luther stresses experience within the context of negative, or here *alogos*, theology. This theology of experience coincides with Luther's explication of his "theology of the cross" versus "a theology of glory" in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) thesis 18-22.<sup>72</sup> The experience of *anfechtung* (spiritual struggle) always lay at the heart of Luther's theological understanding. This spiritual struggle will later serve as the third part of his theological method consisting of prayer, meditation, and struggle (*oratio, meditatio, tentatio*).<sup>73</sup>

68 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 130-1.

69 Jaroslav Pelikan, "Introduction to Volume 29" in *Lectures on Titus, Philemon and Hebrews*, Luther's Works, vol. 29, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968), xii.

70 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Titus, Philemon and Hebrews*, 121.

71 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Titus, Philemon and Hebrews*, 179; emphasis mine.

72 Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 18-22: "18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ. 19. That a person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20]. 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is." Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer: I*, Luther's Works, vol. 31, ed. Harold Grimm (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1957), 40-1.

73 Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer IV*, Luther's Works, vol. 34, eds. Lewis Spitz and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 285-7.

In the *Operationes* on the Psalms (1519-1520), Luther warns against the dangers of commentaries based on the *Mystical Theology*. He claims that “A theologian is made by living, indeed by dying and being damned, not by understanding, reading and speculating.”<sup>74</sup> Citing the *Song of Songs* on the bride of Christ, he states,

I have been reduced to nothing and know nothing. Entering into darkness and the cloud, I see nothing. I live by faith, hope and love alone, and I am weak (that is, I suffer) for when I am weak then I am stronger. This leading the mystical theologians call going into the darkness, ascending beyond being and non-being. Truly I do not know whether they understand themselves, if they attribute it to [humanly] elicited acts and do not rather believe that the sufferings of the cross, death and hell are being signified. The CROSS alone is our theology.<sup>75</sup>

Already at this point we begin to see Luther’s rejection, or rather “correction,”<sup>76</sup> of the Dionysian mystical theology for his theology of the cross. Alister McGrath picks up this passage to indicate the presence of Luther’s theology of the cross before 1520, although, as Paul Rorem laments, he does so “without any reference to Luther’s polemical context of opposing the mystical theology of Dionysius.”<sup>77</sup> The cited passage, combined with the comments on Romans 5:2 are crucial for Rorem’s thesis of continuity in Luther’s rejection of Dionysius. Later in his 1535 Lectures on Galatians Luther will employ the same mystical language of “going into the darkness” to speak of the “darkness of faith” as opposed to the reason of the law.<sup>78</sup>

Luther’s move away from Dionysian mystical theology towards a theology of the cross becomes obvious in his 1520 treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

But you will say: “What do you do with Dionysius, who in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* enumerates six sacraments, among which he also includes ordination? I answer: I am well aware that this is the one writer of antiquity who is cited in support of the seven sacraments, although he omits marriage and so has only six. But we read nothing at all about these “sacraments” in the rest of the fathers; nor do they ever regard them as sacraments when they speak of these things...Indeed to speak more boldly, it greatly

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74 Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” 296-7.

75 Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” 297; the capital letters are Luther’s.

76 Piotr J. Malysz, “Luther and Dionysius: Beyond Mere Negations,” in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. by Sarah Coakley and Charles Stang (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 149-162.

77 Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” 297.

78 “Ascend into the darkness, where neither the Law nor reason shines, but only the dimness of faith (1 Cor. 13:12), which assures us that we are saved by Christ alone, without any Law. Thus the Gospel leads us above and beyond the light of the Law and reason into the darkness of faith, where the Law and reason have no business. The Law, too, deserves a hearing, but in its proper place and time. When Moses was on the mountain speaking with God face to face, he neither had nor established nor administered the Law. But now that he has come down from the mountain, he is lawgiver and rules the people by the law. So the conscience must be free from the Law, but the body must obey the Law” (113). And, “It [true faith] takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. Thus faith is a sort of knowledge or darkness that nothing can see. Yet the Christ of whom faith takes hold is sitting in this darkness as God sat in the midst of darkness on Sinai and in the temple. Therefore our ‘formal righteousness’ is not a love that informs faith; but it is faith itself, a cloud in our hearts, that is, trust in a thing we do not see, in Christ, who is present especially when He cannot be seen. Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. But how He is present – this is beyond our thought; for there is darkness, as I have said. Where the confidence of the heart is present, therefore, there Christ is present, in that very cloud and faith... Here there is no work of the Law, no love; but there is an entirely different kind of righteousness, a new world above and beyond the Law” (129-130). Luther is Dionysius’ language of negative theology here, but subverting it in such a way that the distinction drawn between cataphatic and apophatic theology becomes the distinction between the law/reason and the gospel/faith: “Oh, if only one could distinguish carefully here and not look for the Law in the Gospel but keep it as separate from the Law as heaven is distant from the earth” which is easy in theory, but “well-nigh incomprehensible” in the heat of “the conflict of conscience and in practice” (72). Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4*, Luther’s Works, vol. 26, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963).

displeases me to assign such importance to this **Dionysius, whoever he may have been**, for he shows hardly any signs of solid learning. I would ask, by what authority and with what arguments does he prove his hodge-podge about the angels and his *Celestial Hierarchy* – a book over which many curious and superstitious spirits have cudged their brains? If one were to read and judge without prejudice, is not everything in it his own fancy and very much like a dream? But in his *Theology*, which is rightly called *Mystical*, of which certain very ignorant theologians make so much, **he is downright dangerous, for he is more of a Platonist than a Christian**. So if I had my way, no believing soul would give the least attention to these books. **So far, indeed, from learning Christ in them, you will lose even what you already know of him. I speak from experience. Let us rather hear Paul, that we may learn Jesus Christ and him crucified** [1 Cor. 2:2]. He is the way, the life, and the truth; he is the ladder [Gen. 28:12] by which we come to the Father, as he says: “No one comes to the Father, but by me” [John 14:6]

Similarly, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, what does this Dionysius do but describe certain churchly rites, and **amuse himself with allegories** without proving anything... it would not be difficult for me to compose a better hierarchy than that of Dionysius; for he knew nothing of pope, cardinals and archbishops, and put the bishop at the top. Who has so weak a mind as not to be able to launch into allegories? I would not have a theologian devote himself to allegories until he has exhausted the legitimate and simple meaning of the Scripture; otherwise his theology will bring him into danger, as Origen discovered.

Therefore a thing does not need to be a sacrament simply because Dionysius so describes it. Otherwise, why not also make a sacrament of the [funeral] processions, which he describes in his book, and which continue to this day?<sup>79</sup>

This is the longest and most important of Luther's comments on Dionysius. By this point he not only clearly rejects Dionysius, but now finds his teaching “downright dangerous.” Rorem argues that the change that accrued in Luther's writings at this point is not doctrinal but rather historical. Rorem suggests that Luther had already rejected Dionysius on doctrinal grounds, but here forever gets rid of the notion of the author of the *CD* as the historical Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17. This change was more than likely occasioned by Erasmus's edition of the Greek New Testament of 1516, which contained a footnote on Acts 17:34 drawing attention to Lorenzo Valla's arguments against the apostolic authorship of the *CD*.<sup>80</sup> Not only is Dionysius now not apostolic, he is shown to be more of a Platonist than a Christian. Further, one will not learn Christ in his writings. Instead of Dionysian Platonizing, Luther proposes to learn from Paul's message of the crucified Christ. Here lays the center of Luther's critique: the writer of the *CD* is not the historical Dionysius of Acts 17 and, moreover, he is dangerous because he does not point us to the heart of the Christian faith as understood in clinging to the promise of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ, but rather leads his readers astray with Platonizing prattle of seeking God in a cloud of unknowing in the transcendence of his cloaked privacy.

Luther's comment that Dionysius amuses “himself with allegories” is further explicated in his *Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig – Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner* (1521). Paul's statement that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 4:36) served as the bases of Emser's, and many others, dual hermeneutic of Scripture between the plain literal meaning and the higher spiritual

<sup>79</sup> Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament II*, Luther's Works, vol. 36, eds. Abdel Wentz and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 109-110; emphasis mine.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” 298.



one. Luther complains that Emser builds his hermeneutic upon Origen and Dionysius<sup>81</sup> thinking this human teaching will suffice and replace actually having to look at Scripture. Luther claims that he himself had made such errors in the past and, therefore, knows from experience that Emser “builds upon sand.” Consequently, Luther finds necessary the comparing of the Fathers’ books with Scripture to judge them according to its light.<sup>82</sup> Luther concludes, “The diligence and efforts of all teachers are directed solely to discovering the literal meaning which alone is valid for them too.”<sup>83</sup>

Two passages in the collection entitled *Table Talk* (1532-1533) are also important for our study, first:

*The Defects of Speculative or Mystical Theology, Fall 1533.* The speculative learning of the theologians is altogether worthless. I have read Bonaventure on this, and he almost drove me mad because I desired to experience the union of God with my soul (about which he babbles) through a union of intellect and will. Such theologians are nothing but fanatics. This is the true speculative theology (and it’s practical too): Believe in Christ and do what you ought. Likewise, **the mystical theology of Dionysius** is nothing but trumpery, and Plato prattles that everything is non-being and everything is being, and he leaves it at that. This is what mystical theology declares: Abandon your intellect and senses and rise up above being and non-being.<sup>84</sup>

Another passage, *God is Unknowable and Yet Known* (April 20-May 16, 1532), also speaks of Plato and affirmations/negations. Luther laments that his opponent John Eck (1486-1543) followed Plato and “other theologians” in saying that “the affirmative definition is uncertain but the negative definition is absolute.”<sup>85</sup> Luther suggests that instead of speaking of an affirmative and negative definition of God one should state that “God is incomprehensible and invisible, and hence whatever is comprehended and seen is not God” or, “God is both visible and invisible. He is visible through his Word and work. Apart from his Word and work one should not look for him.” Luther says that “these theologians have wished to apprehend God through speculations and have paid no attention to the Word.” He recommends that such speculation “be laid aside” and suggests “this rule [be] adhered to after” his death.<sup>86</sup>

In 1535 Luther decided to devote the rest of his life to an exposition of the books of Moses beginning with Psalm 90.<sup>87</sup> Luther explains that in this Psalm Moses details the miseries of life due to sin and death. Moses is being truly “Mosaic,” in that he is “a stern minister of death, God’s wrath, and sin.”<sup>88</sup> Moses depicts that before we die physically, “we have been put to death and are overwhelmed with dreadful miseries”<sup>89</sup> due to the wrath of God over sin. Moses (and the law) “terrifies, not in order to destroy or to let such sinners pine away in despair, but in order to bring consolation to such sinners” through the promise of the gospel.<sup>90</sup> Commenting on Psalm 90:7, “For we perish because of Thy wrath, and we are terrified because of Thy furious anger,” Luther says

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81 Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry I*, Luther’s Works, vol. 39, eds. Erich Gritsch and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 175.

82 Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry I*, 175.

83 Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry I*, 177; although it should be noted here that Luther’s understanding of the literal sense of the text is still more pre-modern than later modern historical-critical methodology; see David Steinmetz’s well known article “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis” recently printed in *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-14.

84 Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, Luther’s Works, vol. 54, ed. and trs. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 112; emphasis mine.

85 Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, 35.

86 *Ibid.*

87 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, Luther’s Works, vol. 13, ed Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956), 75.

88 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 77.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 78.

that such terror can produce the “agitations of a muttering, blaspheming, and doubting heart.”<sup>91</sup> The thoughts produced by such intense struggle are “sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26), and they:

can be felt, like all other spiritual thoughts, but they cannot be expressed in words, and they can be learned only through **experience**. Therefore Dionysius, who wrote about “negative theology” and “affirmative theology,” deserves to be ridiculed. In the latter part of his work he defines “affirmative theology” as “God is being.” “Negative theology” he defines as “God is nonbeing.” But if we wish to give a true definition of **“negative theology,” we should say that it is the holy cross and the afflictions** in which we do not, it is true, discern God, but in which nevertheless those sighs are present of which I have already spoken.<sup>92</sup>

One must not despair when they experience such agitation and blasphemous thoughts towards God due to the darts of the enemy, but realize that “our afflictions are intended for our betterment.”<sup>93</sup> God permits such feelings of affliction “that we may sigh and pray to Him.”<sup>94</sup> The feelings of God’s wrath are also necessary in order to put continually to death the old Adam and the old Eve.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the true silence of negative theology is not the negations of affirmations, but rather prayerful sighs in the midst of deep spiritual struggle.

A few days after finishing his lectures on Psalms 90, Luther turned his attention to the book of Genesis (1535-), in which he is still speaking against Dionysius. Luther accuses Dionysius of making up silly prattle about the hierarchies of heaven and the church and leading people astray in over allegorizing Genesis 1-3. Commenting on the image of God in humanity (Gen. 1:26), Luther says that some Fathers such as Augustine have been led to find some sort of trinity in humans. Luther says that this is really not that helpful, especially when it leads to discussions concerning the freedom of the will, as the Augustinian aphorism “God, who created you without you, will not save you without you.”<sup>96</sup> Luther laments that “from here the conclusion was drawn that free will co-operated as the preceding and efficient cause of salvation. No different is the assertion of Dionysius, though more dangerous than the former, when he says that although the demons and the human beings fell, nevertheless their natural endowments, such as the mind, memory, will, etc., remained unimpaired. But if this is true, it follows that by the powers of his natural man can bring about his own salvation.” Luther proceeds to caution his readers to read the Fathers, such as Dionysius, “with discretion,” for our memories, wills, and minds “are most depraved.”<sup>97</sup> Speaking of the Cherubim placed at the entrance to the garden, Luther laments people’s overreliance on the angelology of Dionysius:

Among the Greek theologians there is Dionysius. **They boast that he was a disciple of Paul, but there is no truth to this.** He is full of the silliest prattle when he discusses the hierarchy of heaven and that of the church. He invents nine choirs, just like the spheres, assigning the seraphim to the highest rank, then, in order, the cherubim, the thrones, the dominions, the virtues, and the principalities; thereafter, in the lower hierarchy, the powers, the archangels, and the angels. Who does not realize that these are nothing but idle and useless human ideas.<sup>98</sup>

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91 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 108.

92 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 111; emphasis mine.

93 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 113.

94 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 114.

95 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, 115.

96 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, Luther’s Works, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), 61.

97 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 61.

98 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 235; emphasis mine

Luther claims that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is just as ridiculous, for Dionysius does not have “a single word about faith or any useful instruction from the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>99</sup> In the introduction to Genesis chapter four, Luther states, “At last we have passed over that expanse of text on which all expositors have toiled exceedingly...although its entire content was rather clear to us because we did not concern ourselves with allegories but adhered to the historical and strict meaning,” whereas other interpreters give greater importance to Origen and Dionysius than to Moses himself who “does not intend to present allegories but simply to write the history of the primitive world.”<sup>100</sup> In the Genesis Lectures, Luther rejects Dionysius on hermeneutical and soteriological grounds. Soteriologically, Luther believed that Dionysius taught that human faculties were not fully impaired from the fall and thus were therefore able to raise up to God on their own accord.

### Conclusion

Luther rejects Dionysius historically, hermeneutically, philosophically and soteriologically. He rejects him historically because, after the *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther no longer regarded Dionysius as the convert of Paul. Luther rejects him hermeneutically because Dionysius invents allegories of celestial and ecclesial hierarchies which have no basis in Scripture, but are rather based on his own whims and fantasies. Luther rejects him philosophically because Dionysius’s over reliance on the categories and language of Platonism and not the simple proclamation of Paul’s crucified Christ. Luther rejected Dionysius soteriologically because of his absence of the message of the cross and his unadulterated view of people which, in Luther’s opinion, led to a salvation of self-ascent. Conversely, Luther admonishes his Wittenberg theologians philosophically to seek God as he has revealed himself in his work and Word not in his uncreated hiddenness, hermeneutically to read the Bible simply, historically and literally, and soteriologically to preach the gospel of Christ crucified as the only hope in life and death.

Gerhard O. Forde wrote a book early on in his career entitled, *Where God Meets Man*, which is excellent fodder for our closing comments. Where does God meet us? For Luther, God meets us on the earth, in the proclaimed word of the gospel and in spiritual struggle (sighs) which drives us back to the external word of our baptism; for Dionysius, humanity meets God beyond the affirmation of words and in an unknowing of the self. Luther’s theology is earthy whereas Dionysius’s is other-worldly, even un-worldly. The earthiness of Luther’s theology is exemplified in *The Small Catechism*’s explanation of the first article of the Apostle’s Creed: “God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property...” (SC 2.1);<sup>101</sup> and in the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer on the meaning of daily bread: “Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children.”<sup>102</sup> Luther’s theology, like Dionysius’s, is experiential, but Luther’s experience is rooted in the active Word of God, especially the “dialogical exchange” that is justification, as Luther explicated in his 1532 interpretation of Psalm 51: “the proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison.”<sup>103</sup> Luther’s point is that true theological knowledge occurs in the event of the sinner encountering God’s forgiveness in Christ and not beyond this movement. It is no coincidence either that the heart of Luther’s theology was found in the Psalms, because for Luther justification was a dialogical exchange of confessing sin and hearing the absolution of God’s forgiveness.<sup>104</sup>

99 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 235.

100 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 237.

101 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354.

102 *The Book of Concord*, 357.

103 Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms I*, Luther’s Works, vol. 12, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955), 311.

104 Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. and eds. Jeffery Silcock and Mark Mattes (Grand Rapids, MI:

Luther's word-centered spirituality has important pastoral and spiritual implications. First, we may ask with Luther, what truly consoles troubled consciences? I suggest that it is not our contemplative efforts of negation that bring about true union with God and therefore consolation, but rather it is the church's witness to the promise of God, that is, the gospel, that draws one near to Christ, engenders faith, and produces true consolation from the pressure of performance-based righteousness. When someone is in the midst of the throes of turmoil, or grief, or guilt they do not need to be assuaged with silence, but rather they need to hear the living promises of their Lord and Savior spoken to them personally and directly. Secondly, Luther's Christo-centric correction of Dionysius has important implications for the modern trend of spiritual formation. Silence is not the answer to the spiritual malnourishment of the modern world. It is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ that will heal our broken lives. This being the case, there is no movement beyond the historical and temporal self-revelation of God in the story of Israel which culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is where God is visible. The linguistic, personal, and earthy proclamation of the gospel is the bases and boundary of all theology and subsequent pastoral practice, not some interior quality within or some greater step beyond the temporal action, self-revelation, and promises of the Triune God.<sup>105</sup>

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Eerdmans, 2007), 16-18.

<sup>105</sup> My understanding of the locus of theology in time, not outside of time, has been profoundly shaped by the thinking of Robert Jenson. Although the metaphysical implications Jenson draws from this emphasis regarding the being of God is another matter altogether. For an appreciative summary and critique of Jenson's ontology see, Scott R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

Review of *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1879-1915* by Sung-Deuk Oak  
(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013)

GUN CHEOL KIM

What is Korean Protestant Christianity and who made it? Beginning with simple but provocative questions, Sung-Deuk Oak, who holds the Dongsoon Im and Mija Im Chair and is an Associate Professor of Korean Christianity in UCLA, reveals the process of the “Koreanization” of Christianity by means of historical methodology. Korean Protestantism has been known for rapid growth, missionary zeal, and conservatism in its theology. Among others, postcolonial scholars have attributed this conservative tendency to the western missionaries in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. They have claimed that the fundamentalism or conservative evangelicalism of North American Protestant missionaries had so prevailed that religious triumphalism and cultural imperialism based on white supremacy replaced traditional Korean religious culture with the missionaries’ Christianity. The ideological approach, however, often makes a mistake by generalizing one’s identity without a profound investigation into one’s historical background, thereby categorizing it within the ideology of the critic. This is the concern with which historians are often struggling.

Repudiating postcolonial discourses, Oak’s stance is quite integrative by insisting that existing Korean religious traditions also impacted the growth and character of evangelical Christianity so that the historiography of Korean Protestantism should be rewritten from the perspective of cultural exchanges beyond cultural imperialism. By implication, an exhaustive historical examination of the synergy in the relationship between global (universality of Christianity) and local (inculturation) fabric that contributed to shaping Christianity in the Korean Peninsula is indispensable. Accordingly, the goal of this book appears to be to demonstrate that “early Korean Protestantism was a particular Korean-created hybrid of indigenous Korean religious cultures, Chinese Protestantism, and Anglo-American Protestantism”(305).

As a historian, the author is dexterous in handling the primary resources, that are in English, Korean, and Chinese, coming from missionaries’ writings, governmental records, and religious classics as well as a number of the secondary sources related to every issue. Readers will recognize the hermeneutical tool of the author’s approach to the historical sources as fulfillment theory. In six chapters, the author accounts for the development of the unique elements of Korean Protestant Christianity in connection with the concept of fulfillment. Dealing with God, Messiah, and Spirit, the first three chapters show us how the Trinitarian concept of God could be accommodated to Korean people. It reveals that the adoption of *Hananim of the Tan’gun* myth as the Christian God enabled North American missionaries to achieve their final aim to convert individual Koreans by dimming the foreignness of Christianity and sustaining the monotheistic concept of the Christian God simultaneously. Moreover, in the era of turbulence by war, famine, and epidemic at the turn of the twentieth century, the messianic hope given by the combination of the American premillennial urgency of the Second Coming and postmillennial vision for social reform fulfilled the eschatological anxiety of Korean people rooted in the prophecy of the *Chōnggam-nok*. The power encounter between Protestant Christianity and Korean shamanism also could be resolved by Christian exorcism based on the belief that the Holy Spirit is the most powerful among spirits. Thus, the author recounts that “American biblicism, Chinese Protestant exorcism, and the Korean shamanistic healing ceremony were combined in making the Korean Protestant theology of spirits” (184). The last three chapters comprehensively explain the process of the transformation

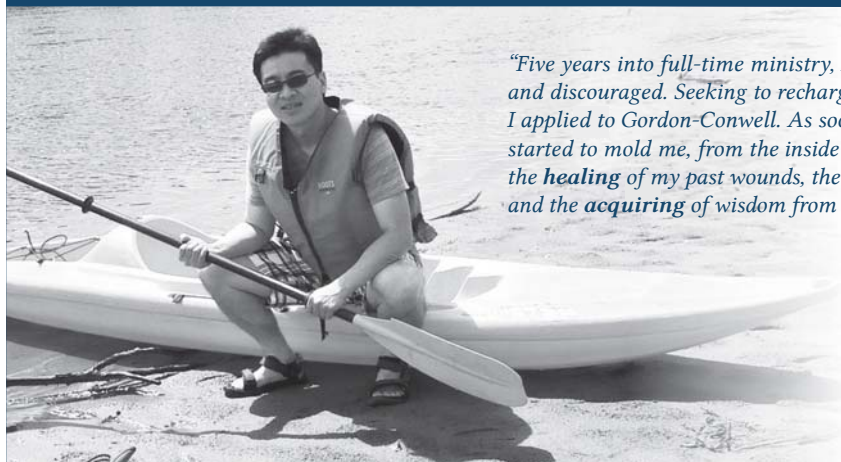


of traditional religious practices into Christian rituals. Specifically, they deal with the meaning of ancestor worship in Korean religiosity and its transition to the Christian memorial service of *ch'udohoe*, and the Daoist Christian impact on the development of Korean Protestant rituals transforming elements of individual discipline into parts of the regular church liturgy, such as dawn prayers, all-night prayers, fasting mountain prayers, and, most likely, audience prayers.

Published as the first volume of the Studies in World Christianity Series of the Nigel Institute of Calvin College and Baylor University Press, this book is significant to the study of Korean Christianity especially in the first three decades of the founding era of Korean Protestantism. It is highly recommended not only for those interested in the development of Korean Christianity, but also for those who want to explore the “creative combination of the principle of Christian universality (vertical transcendence) and that of inculturation (horizontal adaptation)” (316). Oak has given us a paradigmatic model for it.

Rev. Gun Cheol Kim is a Ph.D. candidate in History and Hermeneutics at Boston University and is currently working on his dissertation dealing with Korean Protestant mission history. He earned an M.A. from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey, and Th.M. and M.Div. from Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary in Seoul, South Korea.

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**Review of *Unraveling the End: A Balanced Scholarly Synthesis of Four Competing and Conflicting End Time Views* by John Noe (Indianapolis: East2West Press, 2014)**

JOHN S. EVANS

This latest book by John Noe merits recognition as a major addition to the rapidly growing body of literature devoted to reforming evangelical eschatology. It features detailed descriptions of four prominent hermeneutical systems, an objective evaluation of each, and a synthesis that incorporates what Noe considers to be their strengths. Ranked in descending order of their current popularity among evangelicals, these systems are: dispensational premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and preterism. In Noe's analysis, this order of ranking should be reversed, and a reversal along the lines he recommends **must** occur if evangelical Christianity is to regain its dynamism and influence.

Preterism merits a high ranking, Noe indicates, because it correctly places the Bible's climactic "time of the end" in the first century A.D. With the destruction of Jerusalem and its great Temple in A.D. 70 and the total obliteration of Judea in the war of A.D. 66-73, the termination of the Old Covenant was completed and the way cleared for the development of the Kingdom of God in the New Covenant, in other words, with "Abraham's real descendants . . . [the] believers in Jesus Christ, whether they are racially Jews or Gentiles" (173).

The preterist view enjoyed considerable support among the early Christian fathers, Noe documents, but it was pushed aside by a persistent bias toward futurizing "the time of the end" that incorporated a belief in a "Second Coming" that would bring Christ's eternal rule. Notwithstanding the lack of scriptural support for such ideas, they achieved almost universal support as biblical Christian doctrine. Over time, as Noe further explains, the postmillennial view that the thousand years of Revelation 20 symbolize a long time became favored among evangelicals. By the mid-twentieth century, however, it was displaced by dispensational premillennialism, while amillennialism simultaneously gained adherents from the general growth of doubts about the Bible's prophetic validity and growth in the belief that the "thousand years" should be understood as symbolic rather than literal.

Noe amply confirms the Bible's amazing prophetic validity, and a major theme in this book is that a greater awareness of this elementary truth will be of enormous benefit to humanity. An outstanding demonstration of this validity is his analysis (217-18) of Daniel's seventy "weeks" (9:24-27). The 490 years incorporated into this prophecy are literal and continuous, running from ca. 457 B.C. to ca. A.D. 34 and highlighting the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, which are **determined** by the events of the seventieth "week," though not actually included in it.

While Noe finds much in preterism with which he agrees, he insists that its proponents tend to overlook the extent to which prophecies, particularly in Revelation, are linked to the future. He also faults them for buying too heavily into Second Coming eschatology—which they tend to confine to the first century. That "He never left" after the events of c.a. A.D. 70 is one of the main themes of Noe's writings. Jesus is very much with us today, Noe contends, and Jesus acts in various ways to influence our world. Noe supports this contention with a tightly reasoned argument that, while Revelation contains much material looking directly ahead in the first century, especially from chapter 10 on, it has an idealistic aspect that reveals that Christ is active today in shaping human destiny.

In his synthesis, Noe suggests that each of the four hermeneutical systems offers features that will prove valuable in the reformation of eschatology. Thus, even dispensationalism offers an emphasis on biblical prophecy that could be of great value if properly oriented. The biggest challenges are to understand correctly how the Bible has foretold the past and how it relates to the future.

On the negative side, although this book contains a lengthy scriptural index, it lacks a subject index. And given its emphasis on Revelation and its insistence that it does not foretell some kind of end time for humanity, I find it disappointing that Noe does not spell out his precise views on the thousand years and the judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. But the book is highly readable and superbly relevant for our time. I look forward to John Noe's future writings.

John S. Evans, Ph.D., taught economics and finance for forty years, most of them at the University of Alabama. He began the serious study of the Bible around 1988 and has authored two self-published books on Daniel, *The Four Kingdoms of Daniel* (2004) and *The Prophecies of Daniel Two* (2008).

Review of *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*  
by Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and  
Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013)

MEGAN K. DEFranza

Gordon-Conwell alumnus Soong-Chan Rah has been working for some time to open our eyes to the captivity of evangelical Christianity to Western cultural mores. His book *The Next Evangelicalism* (138 pp. aside from notes and glossary), has shown that the decolonizing project is not merely the latest fad in liberal theological circles; rather, repentance from the sin of racism is at the heart of the healing work of the Spirit in our time. And, yet, Rah confesses that his own text is nearly silent on what he admits is “male captivity of the American evangelical church” and its theology.<sup>1</sup> If Rah is right, and I believe he is, then we must take the next step and attend to theological reflection from the other half of the church—female voices in all their beautiful diversity. Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier have been among us for some time—as pastors, teachers, theologians, worshipers, leaders, and lovers of God. Two serve as Deans (at Eastern University and Asbury Seminary) and all three have published theological works of their own. It is long past time we lent them our ears.

Given the spirit of renewal breathing through this text, readers should not be surprised to find the Spirit as Guide and Ground for their project. The authors know this Spirit from personal experience as the One who has called, empowered, and emboldened them—both individually and collectively. They see in the historical marginalization of the Spirit reflections of their own lives. As pneumatology is often subsumed under christology, Trinity, ecclesiology, and spirituality, so have their unique contributions been obscured beneath the work of others (18-19): “*Evangélicas* know this wild child, who is often preferred as absence rather than *presencia* (presence) because we too have experienced being treated as no-bodies and invisible nothings. ... [W]e resonate with such a Spirit who comes to us ..., who opens up the arms of God’s *ekstatic* love to us, and makes our hearts sour when we pray, ‘Come, Holy Spirit!’ In response, we open our spirits and lives to the unexpected miracles that take place when we utter such a phrase” (19). Thus, they reverse the standard order of systematic exploration, beginning with pneumatology before moving on to soteriology, Trinity, hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and eschatology—all the while recognizing the centrality of the Bible among the sources of experience, reason, and tradition (131). Their collaborative and dialogical approach, too, shows the strength of “*teología en conjunto*” (127).

*Latina Evangélicas* is an accessible text, supplemented by study questions at the end of each brief chapter. It would be an excellent resource for any college- or seminary-level systematic, contemporary theology, or hermeneutics course, and deserves a wide readership, well beyond specialized courses in feminist, liberation, or postcolonial studies. If Mabiala Kenzo and John Franke are right, that the future of evangelical theology is postcolonial, and if the Pew Research forum is correct, that “at least a quarter of the world’s 2 billion Christians” are Pentecostal, we would be wise to lean in and give them our attention, praying with them in one accord, “Come, Holy Spirit!”<sup>2</sup>

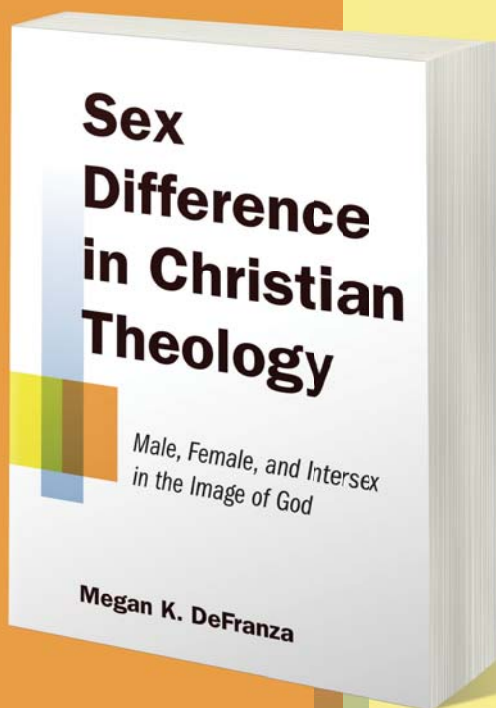
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1 Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 22.

2 Mabiala Kenzo and John R. Franke, “The Future of Evangelical Theology in an Age of Empire: Postfoundational and Postcolonial,” in *Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo*, Bruce Ellis Benson and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, eds. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 267-77. Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life Project, Polling and Analysis, “Spirit and Power - A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” Pentecostal Resource Page (Oct. 5, 2006) <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/pentecostal-resource-page/>.



Megan K. DeFranza, Ph.D. (Marquette University) is an alumna of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (MATH & MABL) and has served as a visiting instructor at the Hamilton campus and as an Athanasius Scholar at Gordon-Conwell's Center for Urban Ministerial Education in Boston. She is a Visiting Researcher at the Boston University School of Theology working with the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion Sex Differences in Religion Project. Megan is the author of *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Eerdmans, 2015) and has contributed chapters to *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (IVP, 2014) and *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). She lives with her husband and two daughters in Beverly, MA.



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## Review of *Murder Intelligently Designed* by Becky Wooley (Charleston, SC: Wooley, 2013)

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

Those seeking a “Christian Novel” that sugar-coats the gospel – an illustrated tract one can give to a non-Christian friend (while one sneaks off oneself to enjoy the latest expanded fragment of yet another final Robert Parker offering) - will not find this book fulfilling their pious expectations, though it very well may be enjoyed by their pre-, un-, or post-Christian friend.

Becky Wooley, the perpetrator of Wipf and Stock’s Resource Publications’ scathing mystery/satire *Non-Prophet Murders*, is back at it again with another gritty, dark, comic mystery full of all the mess of life: sex, betrayal, death, shot down the middle by God’s grace and all ladled out in generous doses. Less sardonic than the first entry in this series that introduced the young college-age protagonists, “Grit” Griffin and Grace Willis, who keep turning up bodies in unexpected places, this second mystery is as much adventure as social satire.

Author Becky Wooley is a renegade fundamentalist and veteran minister’s wife who has survived ministry with her husband in fifteen congregations of the Church of Christ, and, therefore, as her first book’s biographical sketch assures us, “she knows where the bodies are buried.”

She is also a first class writer, with a firm grasp on literary techniques (including a street prophet who serves as her story’s Greek chorus), and her deft use of language is a delight to read. Here are a few samples: “In life, Brother Malcolm Prindle had been as cold and rigid as hanged winter wash. In death, he was slightly more flexible” (44); “Funerals by definition are not happy occasions, but this was the worst. The eulogy was a long, doctrinaire sermon on the importance of being a member of the One True Church which concluded with the erroneous syllogism: ‘Bro. Prindle was baptized in The One True Church. Only members of the One True Church go to heaven, ergo: Bro. Prindle is in heaven.’ End of Story. The visiting minister – a nephew or cousin or big-name preacher from out of town, Grace didn’t note which – preached Bro Prindle into a tiresome heaven full of deceased saints who would spend eternity sitting in church. She kept herself from walking out by composing a sermon for her own funeral. *Anyone delivering my eulogy will tell the world that Amy Grace Willis is in heaven the only way anyone gets there, by the blood of Christ and the grace of God. And they should throw in a few dozen verses about heavenly feasting, dancing angels, and musical instruments*” (45); “In the History Department, Dr. Duper’s replacement was greeted with open disbelief. The administration had called up a professor emeritus whose chief qualification to teach history, judging by his appearance, was his having lived most of it. The aged professor was a throwback to the days of tweed jackets, extravagant mustaches and meerscham pipes. He stood in an easy slouch – hand to pipe, pipe to mouth – puffing out a haze of fragrant tobacco smoke and sporting half glasses near the end of his nose. Leather patches on his elbows were clearly worn, and his pleated wool trousers had seen better days several decades ago. History, as far as Duper’s students were concerned, was about to get up-close and personal” (164); “Sue Anne was not the first recalcitrant adolescent Suzy Griffin had cajoled into her confidence, but she was one of the easiest. All it took was home-baked cookies, a glass of milk, and a story or two about Grit and his brother. Within minutes of sitting down in the kitchen, Sue Anne let loose. Fear and pain sprayed out of her like soda from a shaken bottle – dark, sticky and all at once” (192).

As one can see, the rapier of wit on display in her first book is not yet fully sheathed, and one can find the author’s sardonic approach displayed particularly in the wordplays on the names she chooses. Her Christian protagonist is “Grace.” The post-Christian professor, duped out of his faith by his doctoral studies, is “Duper.” A predatory professorial blackguard is “Bleckard.” But this book

is so much more than another satire. It is a skillfully composed, full-fledged mystery with well-developed characters, interweaving subplots, and a cleverly worked out puzzle, with an ingenious variation on the locked-room sub-genre that had me guessing all the way through – and, despite all the mystery novels I read before and after my own doctoral work on the “clergy” detectives from Daniel in the Aprocrypha right on through to the present day, I did not guess the solution, though I cannot blame the author, who is consistent in what drives the motivation that she provides for the culprits in both of her novels.

Becky Wooley is a highly intelligent thinker who is treating serious issues in each of her stories. This one has to do with academic prejudice that seeks to shut out any opinion that stands against the spirit of the age. In this instance, reactions spiral out of control when a Christian communications professor seeks to show a documentary entitled “Forbidden,” presenting the case for Intelligent Design to the secular university campus at which most of the young characters teach or attend. The opposition will go to any length to stop it. The parallel to the prejudice that blackballed Hollywood veteran Ben Stein’s documentary, “Expelled,” is obvious and the book’s back cover includes an endorsement from Stein himself.

Disconcerting to readers may be the obviously deep and abiding faith displayed so openly by the Christian characters in the book. They encourage each other to pray about their problems. They meet regularly to worship. They act on their faith. Even in many Christian books, one does not see so many constant references to prayer and church attendance. But, as I thought about it, I realized that the amount of active faith described is exactly reflective of the kind of life that I and the Christians in our little New England storefront church live daily (not to mention my students, colleagues, and the staff of Gordon-Conwell). If this much obvious faith looks strange in a story, it is because the world has conditioned us not to expect to read about what we, who have dedicated our lives to Jesus, do every day. I concluded that this book has far more verisimilitude in my experience than more muted presentations.

Finally, *Murder Intelligently Designed* has a long denouement that will satiate those readers who feel they have suffered a car crash when a novel suddenly stops two seconds after the solution. This one lets us enjoy the aftermath for two more chapters, before the narrative finds exactly the right place to park.

One of the great tensions for mystery writers has been raised by a group called Parents of Murdered Children through their campaign “Murder Is Not Entertainment.” Those who write mysteries that feature a murder need to approach the construction of the story responsibly so that it does not inspire troubled readers to act out the book’s lethal actions. In the case of *Murder Intelligently Designed*, this dilemma is not an issue.

Ultimately, this book leaves readers pondering the lethal dimensions of prejudice – conservative, liberal, and secular, in that order. For that alone, it is a parable worth reading.

William David Spencer, a founding editor of the *Africanus Journal*, is Gordon-Conwell’s Ranked Adjunct Professor of Theology and the Arts, teaching at its Boston campus, Center for Urban Ministerial Education, and the author of 13 books, including the new mystery novel, *Name in the Papers*, winner of the Southern California Motion Picture Council Golden Halo Award for “Outstanding Contribution to Literature,” as well as the definitive study of mysteries that feature clergy solving crimes, *Mysterium and Mystery: The Clerical Crime Novel*.

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**Review of *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures, Volume One* edited by Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013)**

AÍDA BESANÇON SPENCER

Many biblical scholars are familiar with James H. Charlesworth's two volume *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985). Now Richard Bauckham, professor emeritus of New Testament at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland and senior scholar at the University of Cambridge, England, James R. Davila, professor of early Jewish studies at the University of St. Andrews, and Alexander Panayotov, research associate in the Divinity Faculty at the University of Cambridge, have amassed a group of thirty scholars, including themselves, to collect thirty-nine additional Jewish, Christian and polytheistic texts to supplement the earlier collections by Charlesworth (xxviii). They define Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as "ancient books that claim to be written by a character in the Old Testament or set in the same time period as the Old Testament and recount narratives related to it, but which do not belong to the Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant biblical canons" (xvii). The term "pseudepigrapha" or "false" or "fictional writing" was attested as first used by Serapion, bishop of Antioch in the early third century, for false or fictional writings written in the names of the apostles such as the *Gospel of Peter* (xviii-xix). Some of the works in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* are rewritten Scripture, expansion of Scripture, magical literature, and apocalypse (xxxv-xxxvi). The cutoff date for the editors is the early seventh century C.E. (Christian Era or A.D., xxviii, xxx) before the rise of Islam, but in reality many documents are later than earlier, for example, the attractive story of *The Heartless Rich Man and the Precious Stone* from the ninth-eleventh centuries (360) and the *Cave of Treasures* (7<sup>th</sup> century), *Palaea Historica* (9<sup>th</sup> century), *The Treatise of the Vessels* (17<sup>th</sup> century, xxx). Even though not Scripture, in many cases these pieces are interesting and instructive (xxxiii), although often short and esoteric. Each document has an extensive introduction and a new translation. The two volume work promises to include all known surviving pseudepigrapha. In the present volume, the earliest surviving Old Testament pseudepigrapha is the *Balaam Text from Tell Deir 'Allā* (700 B.C.E.) (xx, 236). Other early works include *Aramaic Levi* from the *Testament of Naphtali*, the *Book of Giants*, and the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel* (xxxi). Some texts were discovered after the Charlesworth collection was completed, such as the *Song of the Lamb* and *Revelation of Gabriel* (xxvii). Some texts are updated since being included in the Charlesworth editions: the *Life of Adam and Eve*, *Horarium of Adam*, *Treatise of Shem*, *2 Enoch*, *Ladder of Jacob*, *Testament of Job*, *Testament of Solomon*, *Assumption/Testament of Moses*, *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, and *Vision of Ezra* (xxix). Some documents are simply quotations from other sources, such as the Exorcist Psalms of David and Solomon (291). Most of the texts were composed or transmitted by Christians, rather than Jews (xxvii, xxxiii). Excluded are works such as the Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Coptic Gnostic works of the Nag Hammadi library, ancient Greco-Egyptian mystical works of the Hermetic corpus, Greco-Egyptian incantations of the Greek Magical Papyri, and Jewish mystical texts known as the Hekhalot Literature (xxix). The different documents are helpfully listed by name of the Old Testament character in the traditional biblical chronological order (xxx), such as *The Life of Adam*, and those that concern a theme, such as *The Cave of Treasures*.

Some of the texts are endearing because they simply answer questions about which many of us have wondered. For example, how did Melchizedek become monotheistic and not have any father or mother? (See *The Story of Melchizedek*, written probably in the fourth to fifth century C.E. [72], which cites Nicaea [13:14] [81].) Or, what questions did the Queen of Sheba ask Solomon when she visited him? (See *Questions of the Queen of Sheba and Answers by King Solomon* [338ff.].) What

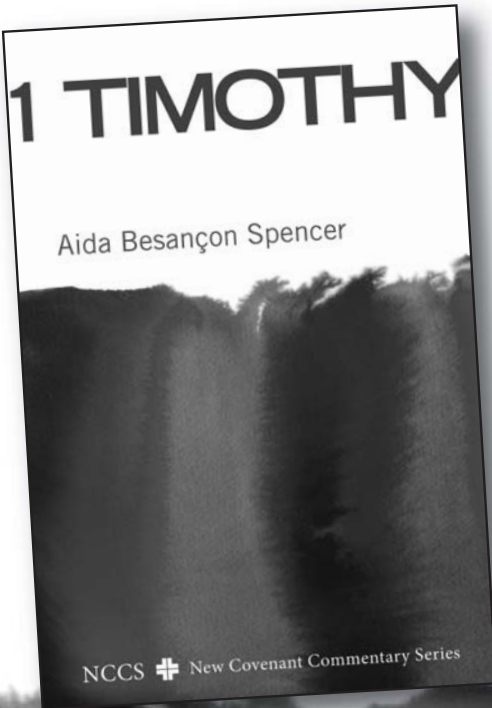


did David sing to Saul to remove his evil spirit? (See Exorcistic Psalms of David and Solomon, dating from the first to sixth centuries [291].)

Even though these works were not included “principally as background to the New Testament” (xxviii), the main difficulties occur when the authors do compare these works to the canonical Bible, especially to the New Testament. For instance, the well-respected scholar Bauckham cites his theory that James 4:5 “may well come from *Eldad and Modad*” (250). This document is made up of four Greek words quoted by the Shepherd of Hermas (“The Lord is near to those who return to him”). It takes quite a lot of subjective reasoning to see those words as the source for James’ “the spirit which yearns for envy settled among us” or “the Spirit he [God] made to dwell in us loathes envy” (249). Once the canon is not determined by the Bible, the “canon” or standard of authority becomes very subjective (xii). Charlesworth, in the foreword, claims that *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* is “high on the list of the most important publications in biblical studies over the past twenty-five years” (xi). Charlesworth may be right in regard to the enormous work the authors have expended to translate and introduce each work. However, his own loose view of canonicity is reflected in the work. Not only does he not think that Peter wrote 2 Peter and that Proverbs and the Song of Songs were not written by Solomon, but he concludes that they therefore can be labeled “pseudepigrapha” that are canonized within the Bible (xv-xvi). He also believes that heresy often precedes orthodoxy (xii). The editors agree with him that many books in the major biblical canons are “equally fictional” as pseudepigrapha, such as Deuteronomy and Daniel. They conclude that “modern biblical criticism” has “rendered a simple belief that Moses wrote the Pentateuch highly dubious” (xix). These “historians” become less “historical” when they abandon the Bible’s claims for itself. Jesus himself had such a “simple belief” (e.g., Mark 7:10; Luke 24:27). Many well educated and thoughtful scholars now for many years have documented their reasons for believing Moses did write the Pentateuch (see for example the classic by Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses*). Where does the child-like trust in the claims of the Bible authors remain? Nevertheless, for the careful reader, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* is a helpful reference tool which has gathered together a diverse group of ancient documents.

Aída Besançon Spencer is Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA. She has written on the danger of parallelomania in the first issue of the *Africanus Journal* (1:1 [April 2009]). She has also written numerous books and articles, including most recently two commentaries in the New Covenant Commentary Series on *1 Timothy* and *2 Timothy and Titus*.

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**Review of *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*  
by Aída Besançon Spencer (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013)**

FREEMAN BARTON

This book is a valuable contribution to the New Covenant Commentary Series. A native of the Dominican Republic, Dr. Aída Besançon Spencer well represents the multi-national authorship of the series. She has a number of other qualifications that make her a good candidate for this assignment. She has the requisite academic degrees. She has been an ordained Presbyterian minister for over forty years, a pastor, a teacher of women and men at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for over three decades, and a prolific author.

Perhaps her spiritual orientation is even more important. “I am a ‘scholar,’ but also a believer with the simple faith of a child. ...I have, therefore, not read these letters [1, 2 Timothy, Titus] as a skeptic, but as someone in love with God, who inspired the words and thoughts” (2).

Her writing is so clear in content and syntax that one might think it to be a non-scholarly book. That would be a mistake. It has the conventional contents of an introduction: authorship, place, occasion, date. It has more—a seven page examination of Ephesus, the geographical and cultural base for the letter. It helps that Dr. Spencer and her husband were there on the scene.

Spencer deals with the letter unit by unit, relating it to other Scriptures and to the first century setting—and to the twenty first. This approach makes it possible to spend more time on particular topics—widows, for example (123-135) and elders (78-95). The author also gives cogent solutions to the common conundrums: women’s silence in church, salvation through child bearing, and the one-wife elder. Practical applications are set forth in five “Fusing the Horizons.”

I looked for the author’s treatment of three subjects: feminism, ecclesiology, and eschatology. She explains that first century women were poorly educated and not capable of speaking to a group (2:12). When they are sufficiently educated, they may speak (29-31, 55-77).

Spencer notes the significant charismatic element in the ecclesiology of the Pastorals. Paul is appointed an apostle directly by Christ. Timothy is appointed bishop (*episkopos*) on the basis of prophecy. By prophecy he is assured of his grasp of the truth so that he can address the heterodoxy prominent in Ephesus. Paul compares the Christian warfare against evil to the Roman military, with which the Ephesians were well acquainted.

Neither the letter nor the book has much specifically eschatological. For Paul it is the last times as evidenced by the prevalence of apostasy. Contemporary end time enthusiasts should take note.

This book (and presumably the series) would be a good acquisition not only for professors, but as well, for M.Div. students and young pastors who are building their libraries. It is a good length and style for reading in a New Testament course. And with an exceptionally alert group of adults, it would make a good Bible study text.

Freeman Barton (M. Div., Ph.D.) has enjoyed a decade of “retirement” after fifteen years teaching in a Christian college and twenty years as an academic librarian at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.